

The World's Classics

315

SELECTED ENGLISH  
SHORT STORIES  
(THIRD SERIES)

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SELECTED ENGLISH  
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XIX & XX CENTURIES

(THIRD SERIES)



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# NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

1804-1864

## THE GREAT CARBUNCLE<sup>1</sup>

A MYSTERY OF THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

[From *Twice Told Tales* 1851]

AT nightfall, once, in the olden time, on the rugged side of one of the Crystal Hills, a party of adventurers were refreshing themselves, after a toilsome and fruitless quest for the Great Carbuncle. They had come thither, not as friends, nor partners in the enterprise, but each, save one youthful pair, impelled by his own selfish and solitary longing for this wondrous gem. Their feeling of brotherhood, however, was strong enough to induce them to contribute a mutual aid in building a rude hut of branches, and kindling a great fire of shattered pines, that had drifted down the headlong current of the Amonoosuck, on the lower bank of which they were to pass the night. There was but one of their number, perhaps, who had become so estranged from natural sympathies, by the absorbing spell of the pursuit, as to acknowledge no satisfaction at the sight of human faces, in the remote and solitary region whither they had ascended. A vast extent of wilderness lay between them and the nearest settlement, while scant a mile above their heads was that black verge, where the hills throw off their shaggy mantle of forest trees, and either robe themselves in clouds, or tower naked into the sky. The roar of the Amonoosuck would

<sup>1</sup> The Indian tradition, on which this somewhat extravagant tale is founded, is both too wild and too beautiful to be adequately wrought up in prose. Sullivan, in his *History of Maine*, written since the Revolution, remarks, that even then, the existence of the Great Carbuncle was not entirely discredited.

have been too awful for endurance, if only a solitary man had listened, while the mountain stream talked with the wind

The adventurers, therefore, exchanged hospitable greetings, and welcomed one another to the hut, where each man was the host, and all were the guests of the whole company. They spread their individual supplies of food on the flat surface of a rock, and partook of a general repast, at the close of which, a sentiment of good fellowship was perceptible among the party, though repressed by the idea that the renewed search for the Great Carbuncle must make them strangers again in the morning. Seven men and one young woman, they warmed themselves together at the fire, which extended its bright wall along the whole front of their wigwam. As they observed the various and contrasted figures that made up the assemblage, each man looking like a caricature of himself, in the unsteady light that flickered over him, they came mutually to the conclusion, that an odder society had never met, in city or wilderness, on mountain or plain.

The eldest of the group, a tall, lean, weather-beaten man, some sixty years of age, was clad in the skins of wild animals, whose fashion of dress he did well to imitate, since the deer, the wolf, and the bear had long been his most intimate companions. He was one of those ill-fated mortals, such as the Indians told of, whom, in their early youth, the Great Carbuncle smote with a peculiar madness, and became the passionate dream of their existence. All, who visited that region, knew him as the Seeker, and by no other name. As none could remember when he first took up the search, there went a fable in the valley of the Saco, that for his inordinate lust after the Great Carbuncle, he had been condemned to wander among the mountains till the end of time, still with the same feverish hopes at sunrise, the same despair at eve. Near this miserable Seeker sat a little elderly personage, wearing a high-crowned hat,

shaped somewhat like a crucible. He was from beyond the sea, a Dr Cacaphodel, who had wilted and dried himself into a mummy, by continually stooping over charcoal furnaces and inhaling unwholesome fumes, during his researches in chemistry and alchemy. It was told of him, whether truly or not, that, at the commencement of his studies, he had drained his body of all its richest blood, and wasted it, with other inestimable ingredients, in an unsuccessful experiment—and had never been a well man since. Another of the adventurers was Master Ichabod Pignort, a weighty merchant and selectman of Boston, and an elder of the famous Mr Norton's church. His enemies had a ridiculous story, that Master Pignort was accustomed to spend a whole hour after prayer time, every morning and evening, in wallowing naked among an immense quantity of pine tree shillings, which were the earliest silver coinage of Massachusetts. The fourth, whom we shall notice, had no name, that his companions knew of, and was chiefly distinguished by a sneer that always contorted his thin visage, and by a prodigious pair of spectacles, which were supposed to deform and discolour the whole face of nature, to this gentleman's perception. The fifth adventurer likewise lacked a name, which was the greater pity, as he appeared to be a poet. He was a bright eyed man, but wofully pined away, which was no more than natural, if, as some people affirmed, his ordinary diet was fog, morning mist, and a slice of the densest cloud within his reach, sauced with moonshine whenever he could get it. Certain it is, that the poetry which flowed from him had a smack of all these dainties. The sixth of the party was a young man of haughty mien, and sat somewhat apart from the rest, wearing his plumed hat loftily among his elders, while the fire glittered on the rich embroidery of his dress, and gleamed intensely on the jewelled pommel of his sword. This was the Lord de Vere, who, when at home, was said to spend much of his time in the burial



vault of his dead progenitors, rummaging their mouldy coffins in search of all the earthly pride and vain glory that was hidden among bones and dust, so that, besides his own share, he had the collected haughtiness of his whole line of ancestry

Lastly, there was a handsome youth in rustic garb, and by his side a blooming little person, in whom a delicate shade of maiden reserve was just melting into the rich glow of a young wife's affection. Her name was Hannah, and her husband's Matthew, two homely names, yet well enough adapted to the simple pair, who seemed strangely out of place among the whimsical fraternity whose wits had been set agog by the Great Carbuncle

Beneath the shelter of one hut, in the bright blaze of the same fire, sat this varied group of adventurers, all so intent upon a single object, that, of whatever else they began to speak, their closing words were sure to be illumined with the Great Carbuncle. Several related the circumstances that brought them thither. One had listened to a traveller's tale of this marvellous stone, in his own distant country, and had immediately been seized with such a thirst for beholding it, as could only be quenched in its intensest lustre. Another, so long ago as when the famous Captain Smith visited these coasts, had seen it blazing far at sea, and had felt no rest in all the intervening years, till now that he took up the search. A third, being encamped on a hunting expedition, full forty miles south of the White Mountains, awoke at midnight, and beheld the Great Carbuncle gleaming like a meteor, so that the shadows of the trees fell backward from it. They spoke of the innumerable attempts which had been made to reach the spot, and of the singular fatality which had hitherto withheld success from all adventurers, though it might seem so easy to follow to its source a light that overpowered the moon, and almost matched the sun. It was observable that each smiled scornfully at the madness

of every other, in anticipating better fortune than the past, yet nourished a scarcely hidden conviction, that he would himself be the favoured one. As if to allay their too sanguine hopes, they recurred to the Indian traditions, that a spirit kept watch about the gem, and bewildered those who sought it, either by removing it from peak to peak of the higher hills, or by calling up a mist from the enchanted lake over which it hung. But these tales were deemed unworthy of credit, all professing to believe that the search had been baffled by want of sagacity or perseverance in the adventurers, or such other causes as might naturally obstruct the passage to any given point, among the intricacies of forest, valley, and mountain.

In a pause of the conversation, the wearer of the prodigious spectacles looked round upon the party, making each individual, in turn, the object of the sneer which invariably dwelt upon his countenance.

'So, fellow pilgrims,' said he, 'here we are, seven wise men and one fair damsel—who, doubtless, is as wise as any greybeard of the company—here we are, I say, all bound on the same goodly enterprise. Methinks, now, it were not amiss, that each of us declare what he proposes to do with the Great Carbuncle, provided he have the good hap to clutch it. What says our friend in the bear skin? How mean you, good sir, to enjoy the prize which you have been seeking, the Lord knows how long, among the Crystal Hills?'

'How enjoy it!' exclaimed the aged Seeker, bitterly. 'I hope for no enjoyment from it—that folly has passed long ago! I keep up the search for this accursed stone, because the vain ambition of my youth has become a fate upon me, in old age. The pursuit alone is my strength—the energy of my soul—the warmth of my blood, and the pith and marrow of my bones! Were I to turn my back upon it, I should fall down dead, on the hither side of the Notch, which is the gateway of this mountain region. Yet, not to have my wasted

lifetime back again, would I give up my hopes of the Great Carbuncle ! Having found it, I shall bear it to a certain cavern that I wot of, and there, grasping it in my arms, lie down and die, and keep it buried with me for ever ’

‘ O wretch, regardless of the interests of science ! ’ cried Dr Cacaphodel, with philosophic indignation. ‘ Thou art not worthy to behold, even from afar off, the lustre of this most precious gem that ever was concocted in the laboratory of Nature Mine is the sole purpose for which a wise man may desire the possession of the Great Carbuncle Immediately on obtaining it—for I have a presentiment, good people, that the prize is reserved to crown my scientific reputation—I shall return to Europe, and employ my remaining years in reducing it to its first elements A portion of the stone will I grind to impalpable powder , other parts shall be dissolved in acids, or whatever solvents will act upon so admirable a composition , and the remainder I design to melt in the crucible, or set on fire with the blowpipe By these various methods I shall gain an accurate analysis, and finally bestow the result of my labours upon the world, in a folio volume ’

‘ Excellent ! ’ quoth the man with the spectacles ‘ Nor need you hesitate, learned sir, on account of the necessary destruction of the gem , since the perusal of your folio may teach every mother’s son of us to concoct a Great Carbuncle of his own ’

‘ But, verily,’ said Master Ichabod Pignort, ‘ for mine own part I object to the making of these counterfeits, as being calculated to reduce the marketable value of the true gem I tell ye frankly, sirs, I have an interest in keeping up the price Here have I quitted my regular traffic, leaving my warehouse in the care of my clerks, and putting my credit to great hazard, and, furthermore, have put myself in peril of death or captivity by the accursed heathen savages—and all this without daring to ask the prayers of the congregation,

because the quest for the Great Carbuncle is deemed little better than a traffic with the Evil One. Now think ye that I would have done this grievous wrong to my soul, body, reputation, and estate, without a reasonable chance of profit ? ’

‘ Not I, pious Master Pignort,’ said the man with the spectacles ‘ I never laid such a great folly to thy charge ’

‘ Truly, I hope not,’ said the merchant ‘ Now, as touching this Great Carbuncle, I am free to own that I have never had a glimpse of it, but be it only the hundredth part so bright as people tell, it will surely outvalue the Great Mogul’s best diamond, which he holds at an incalculable sum. Wherefore I am minded to put the Great Carbuncle on shipboard, and voyage with it to England, France, Spain, Italy, or into Heathendom, if Providence should send me thither, and, in a word, dispose of the gem to the best bidder among the potentates of the earth, that he may place it among his crown jewels. If any of ye have a wiser plan, let him expound it ’

‘ That have I, thou sordid man ! ’ exclaimed the poet ‘ Dost thou desire nothing brighter than gold, that thou wouldst transmute all this ethereal lustre into such dross, as thou wallowest in already ? For myself, hiding the jewel under my cloak, I shall hie me back to my attic chamber, in one of the darksome alleys of London. There, night and day will I gaze upon it—my soul shall drink its radiance—it shall be diffused throughout my intellectual powers, and gleam brightly in every line of poesy that I indite. Thus, long ages after I am gone, the splendour of the Great Carbuncle will blaze around my name ! ’

‘ Well said, Master Poet ! ’ cried he of the spectacles ‘ Hide it under thy cloak, sayest thou ? Why, it will gleam through the holes, and make thee look like a jack o’ lantern ! ’

‘ To think ! ’ ejaculated the Lord de Vere, rather to

The young married couple had taken their lodgings in the farthest corner of the wigwam, and were separated from the rest of the party by a curtain of curiously woven twigs, such as might have hung, in deep festoons, around the bridal bower of Eve. The modest little wife had wrought this piece of tapestry, while the other guests were talking. She and her husband fell asleep with hands tenderly clasped, and awoke, from visions of unearthly radiance, to meet the more blessed light of one another's eyes. They awoke at the same instant, and with one happy smile beaming over their two faces, which grew brighter with their consciousness of the reality of life and love. But no sooner did she recollect where they were, than the bride peeped through the interstices of the leafy curtain, and saw that the outer room of the hut was deserted.

'Up, dear Matthew!' cried she in haste. 'The strange folk are all gone!' Up, this very minute, or we shall lose the Great Carbuncle!'

In truth, so little did these poor young people deserve the mighty prize which had lured them thither, that they had slept peacefully all night, and till the summits of the hills were glittering with sunshine, while the other adventurers had tossed their limbs in feverish wakefulness, or dreamed of climbing precipices, and set off to realize their dreams with the earliest peep of dawn. But Matthew and Hannah, after their calm rest, were as light as two young deer, and merely stopped to say their prayers, and wash themselves in a cold pool of the Amonoosuck, and then to taste a morsel of food, ere they turned their faces to the mountain side. It was a sweet emblem of conjugal affection, as they toiled up the difficult ascent, gathering strength from the mutual aid which they afforded. After several little accidents, such as a torn robe, a lost shoe, and the entanglement of Hannah's hair in a bough, they reached the upper verge of the forest, and were now to pursue a more adventurous course. The innumerable trunks

and heavy foliage of the trees had hitherto shut in their thoughts, which now shrank affrighted from the region of wind, and cloud, and naked rocks, and desolate sun shine, that rose immeasurably above them. They gazed back at the obscure wilderness which they had traversed, and longed to be buried again in its depths rather than trust themselves to so vast and visible a solitude.

'Shall we go on?' said Matthew, throwing his arm round Hannah's waist, both to protect her, and to comfort his heart by drawing her close to it.

But the little bride, simple as she was, had a woman's love of jewels, and could not forgo the hope of possessing the very brightest in the world, in spite of the perils with which it must be won.

'Let us climb a little higher,' whispered she, yet tremulously, as she turned her face upward to the lonely sky.

'Come, then,' said Matthew, mustering his manly courage, and drawing her along with him, for she became timid again, the moment that he grew bold.

And upward, accordingly, went the pilgrims of the Great Carbuncle, now treading upon the tops and thickly interwoven branches of dwarf pines, which, by the growth of centuries, though mossy with age, had barely reached three feet in altitude. Next, they came to masses and fragments of naked rock, heaped confusedly together, like a cairn reared by giants, in memory of a giant chief. In this bleak realm of upper air, nothing breathed, nothing grew, there was no life but what was concentrated in their two hearts, they had climbed so high, that Nature herself seemed no longer to keep them company. She lingered beneath them, within the verge of the forest trees, and sent a farewell glance after her children, as they strayed where her own green footprints had never been. But soon they were to be hidden from her eye. Densely and dark the mists began to gather below, casting black spots of shadow on the vast landscape, and sailing heavily to

one centre, as if the loftiest mountain peak had summoned a council of its kindred clouds. Finally, the vapours welded themselves, as it were, into a mass, presenting the appearance of a pavement over which the wanderers might have trodden, but where they would vainly have sought an avenue to the blessed earth which they had lost. And the lovers yearned to behold that green earth again, more intensely, alas! than, beneath a clouded sky, they had ever desired a glimpse of heaven. They even felt it a relief to their desolation, when the mists, creeping gradually up the mountain, concealed its lonely peak, and thus annihilated, at least for them, the whole region of visible space. But they drew closer together, with a fond and melancholy gaze, dreading lest the universal cloud should snatch them from each other's sight.

Still, perhaps, they would have been resolute to climb as far and as high, between earth and heaven, as they could find foothold, if Hannah's strength had not begun to fail, and with that, her courage also. Her breath grew short. She refused to burden her husband with her weight, but often tottered against his side, and recovered herself each time by a feebler effort. At last, she sank down on one of the rocky steps of the acclivity.

'We are lost, dear Matthew,' said she, mournfully. 'We shall never find our way to the earth again. And oh, how happy we might have been in our cottage!'

'Dear heart!—we will yet be happy there,' answered Matthew. 'Look! In this direction, the sunshine penetrates the dismal mist. By its aid I can direct our course to the passage of the Notch. Let us go back, love, and dream no more of the Great Carbuncle!'

'The sun cannot be yonder,' said Hannah, with despondence. 'By this time, it must be noon. If there could ever be any sunshine here, it would come from above our heads.'

'But look!' repeated Matthew, in a somewhat

altered tone 'It is brightening every moment If not sunshine, what can it be?'

Nor could the young bride any longer deny, that a radiance was breaking through the mist, and changing its dim hue to a dusky red, which continually grew more vivid, as if brilliant particles were interused with the gloom. Now, also, the cloud began to roll away from the mountain, while, as it heavily withdrew, one object after another started out of its impenetrable obscurity into sight, with precisely the effect of a new creation, before the indistinctness of the old chaos had been completely swallowed up. As the process went on, they saw the gleaming of water close at their feet, and found themselves on the very border of a mountain lake, deep, bright, clear, and calmly beautiful, spreading from brim to brim of a basin that had been scooped out of the solid rock. A ray of glory flashed across its surface. The pilgrims looked whence it should proceed, but closed their eyes with a thrill of awful admiration, to exclude the fervid splendour that glowed from the brow of a cliff, impending over the enchanted lake. For the simple pair had reached that lake of mystery, and found the long sought shrine of the Great Carbuncle!

They threw their arms around each other, and trembled at their own success, for as the legends of this wondrous gem rushed thick upon their memory, they felt themselves marked out by fate—and the consciousness was fearful. Often, from childhood upward, they had seen it shining like a distant star. And now that star was throwing its intensest lustre on their hearts. They seemed changed to one another's eyes, in the red brilliancy that flamed upon their cheeks, while it lent the same fire to the lake, the rocks, and sky, and to the mists which had rolled back before its power. But, with their next glance, they beheld an object that drew their attention even from the mighty stone. At the base of the cliff, directly beneath the Great Carbuncle, appeared the figure of a man, with his arms extended



in the act of climbing, and his face turned upward, as if to drink the full gush of splendour. But he stirred not, no more than if changed to marble.

'It is the Seeker,' whispered Hannah, convulsively grasping her husband's arm. 'Matthew, he is dead.'

'The joy of success has killed him,' replied Matthew, trembling violently. 'Or, perhaps the very light of the Great Carbuncle was death!'

'The Great Carbuncle,' cried a peevish voice behind them. 'The Great Humbug! If you have found it, prithee point it out to me.'

They turned their heads, and there was the Cynic, with his prodigious spectacles set carefully on his nose, staring now at the lake, now at the rocks, now at the distant masses of vapour, now right at the Great Carbuncle itself, yet seemingly as unconscious of its light, as if all the scattered clouds were condensed about his person. Though its radiance actually threw the shadow of the unbeliever at his own feet, as he turned his back upon the glorious jewel, he would not be convinced that there was the least glimmer there.

'Where is your Great Humbug?' he repeated. 'I challenge you to make me see it!'

'There,' said Matthew, incensed at such perverse blindness, and turning the Cynic round towards the illuminated cliff. 'Take off those abominable spectacles, and you cannot help seeing it!'

Now these coloured spectacles probably darkened the Cynic's sight, in at least as great a degree as the smoked glasses through which people gaze at an eclipse. With resolute bravado, however, he snatched them from his nose, and fixed a bold stare full upon the ruddy blaze of the Great Carbuncle. But scarcely had he encountered it, when, with a deep, shuddering groan, he dropped his head, and pressed both hands across his miserable eyes. Thenceforth there was, in very truth, no light of the Great Carbuncle, nor any other light on earth, nor light of Heaven itself, for the poor Cynic. So long accustomed

to view all objects through a medium that deprived them of every glimpse of brightness, a single flash of so glorious a phenomenon, striking upon his naked vision, had blinded him for ever.

'Matthew,' said Hannah, clinging to him, 'let us go hence!'

Matthew saw that she was faint, and, kneeling down, supported her in his arms, while he threw some of the thrillingly cold water of the enchanted lake upon her face and bosom. It revived her, but could not renovate her courage.

'Yes, dearest!' cried Matthew, pressing her tremulous form to his breast, 'we will go hence, and return to our humble cottage. The blessed sunshine and the quiet moonlight shall come through our window. We will kindle the cheerful glow of our hearth at eventide, and be happy in its light. But never again will we desire more light than all the world may share with us.'

'No,' said his bride, 'for how could we live by day, or sleep by night, in this awful blaze of the Great Carbuncle?'

Out of the hollow of their hands, they drank each a draught from the lake, which presented them its waters uncontaminated by an earthly lip. Then, lending their guidance to the blinded Cynic, who uttered not a word, and even stifled his groans in his own most wretched heart, they began to descend the mountain. Yet, as they left the shore, till then untrodden, of the spirit's lake, they threw a farewell glance towards the cliff, and beheld the vapours gathering in dense volumes, through which the gem burned duskiy.

As touching the other pilgrims of the Great Carbuncle, the legend goes on to tell, that the worshipful Master Ichabod Pignort soon gave up the quest, as a desperate speculation, and wisely resolved to betake himself again to his warehouse, near the town dock, in Boston. But, as he passed through the Notch of the mountains, a war party of Indians captured our unlucky

merchant, and carried him to Montreal, there holding him in bondage, till, by the payment of a heavy ransom, he had wofully subtracted from his hoard of pine tree shillings. By his long absence, moreover, his affairs had become so disordered, that, for the rest of his life, instead of wallowing in silver, he had seldom a sixpence-worth of copper. Dr Cacaphodel, the alchemist, returned to his laboratory with a prodigious fragment of granite, which he ground to powder, dissolved in acids, melted in the crucible, and burned with the blowpipe, and published the result of his experiments in one of the heaviest folios of the day. And, for all these purposes, the gem itself could not have answered better than the granite. The poet, by a somewhat similar mistake, made prize of a great piece of ice, which he found in a sunless chasm of the mountains, and swore that it corresponded, in all points, with his idea of the Great Carbuncle. The critics say, that, if his poetry lacked the splendour of the gem, it retained all the coldness of the ice. The Lord de Vere went back to his ancestral hall, where he contented himself with a wax lighted chandelier, and filled, in due course of time, another coffin in the ancestral vault. As the funeral torches gleamed within that dark receptacle, there was no need of the Great Carbuncle to show the vanity of earthly pomp.

The Cynic, having cast aside his spectacles, wandered about the world, a miserable object, and was punished, with an agonizing desire of light, for the wilful blindness of his former life. The whole night long he would lift his splendour blasted orbs to the moon and stars, he turned his face eastward, at sunrise, as duly as a Persian idolater, he made a pilgrimage to Rome, to witness the magnificent illumination of St Peter's Church, and finally perished in the great fire of London, into the midst of which he had thrust himself, with the desperate idea of catching one feeble ray from the blaze, that was kindling earth and heaven.

Matthew and his bride spent many peaceful years, and

were fond of telling the legend of the Great Carbuncle. The tale, however, towards the close of their lengthened lives, did not meet with the full credence that had been accorded to it by those who remembered the ancient lustre of the gem. For it is affirmed, that, from the hour when two mortals had shown themselves so simply wise as to reject a jewel which would have dimmed all earthly things, its splendour waned. When other pilgrims reached the cliff, they found only an opaque stone, with particles of mica glittering on its surface. There is also a tradition that, as the youthful pair departed, the gem was loosened from the forehead of the cliff, and fell into the enchanted lake, and that, at noontide, the Seeker's form may still be seen to bend over its quenchless gleam.

Some few believe that this inestimable stone is blazing, as of old, and say that they have caught its radiance, like a flash of summer lightning, far down the valley of the Saco. And be it owned, that, many a mile from the Crystal Hills, I saw a wondrous light around their summits, and was lured, by the faith of poesy, to be the latest pilgrim of the GREAT CARBUNCLE.

### RAPPACCINT'S DAUGHTER

*From the Writings of Aubépine*

[From *Mosses from an Old Manse* 1854]

WE do not remember to have seen any translated specimens of the productions of M. de l'Aubépine—a fact the less to be wondered at, as his very name is unknown to many of his own countrymen as well as to the student of foreign literature. As a writer, he seems to occupy an unfortunate position between the Transcendentalists (who, under one name or another, have their share in all the current literature of the world) and the great body of pen and ink men who address the intellect and sympathies of the multitude. If not too refined, at

all events too remote, too shadowy and unsubstantial in his modes of development, to suit the taste of the latter class, and yet too popular to satisfy the spiritual or metaphysical requisitions of the former, he must necessarily find himself without an audience, except here and there an individual or possibly an isolated clique. His writings, to do them justice, are not altogether destitute of fancy and originality, they might have won him greater reputation but for an inveterate love of allegory, which is apt to invest his plots and characters with the aspect of scenery and people in the clouds and to steal away the human warmth out of his conceptions. His fictions are sometimes historical, sometimes of the present day, and sometimes, so far as can be discovered, have little or no reference either to time or space. In any case, he generally contents himself with a very slight embroidery of outward manners—the faintest possible counterfeit of real life—and endeavours to create an interest by some less obvious peculiarity of the subject. Occasionally a breath of Nature, a randrop of pathos and tenderness, or a gleam of humour, will find its way into the midst of his fantastic imagery, and make us feel as if, after all, we were yet within the limits of our native earth. We will only add to this very cursory notice that M. de l'Aubepine's productions, if the reader chance to take them in precisely the proper point of view, may amuse a leisure hour as well as those of a brighter man, if otherwise, they can hardly fail to look excessively like nonsense.

Our author is voluminous, he continues to write and publish with as much praiseworthy and indefatigable prolixity as if his efforts were crowned with the brilliant success that so justly attends those of Eugene Sue. His first appearance was by a collection of stories in a long series of volumes entitled *Contes deux fois racontés*. The titles of some of his more recent works (we quote from memory) are as follows. *Le Voyage Celeste a Chemin de Fer*, 3 tom., 1838. *Le nouveau Pere Adam et*

*la nouvelle Mere Eve*, 2 tom, 1839 *Roderic, ou le Serpent a l'estomac*, 2 tom, 1840 *Le Culte du Feu*, a folio volume of ponderous research into the religion and ritual of the old Persian\*Ghebers, published in 1841 *La Soiree du Chateau en Espagne*, 1 tom 8vo, 1842, and *L'Artiste du Beau, ou le Papillon Mecanique*, 5 tom 4to, 1843 Our somewhat wearisome perusal of this startling catalogue of volumes has left behind it a certain personal affection and sympathy, though by no means admiration, for M de l'Aubépine, and we would fain do the little in our power towards introducing him favourably to the American public The ensuing tale is a translation of his *Beatrice, ou la Belle Empoisonneuse*, recently published in *La Revue Anti-Aristocratique* This journal, edited by the Comte de Bearhaven, has for some years past led the defence of liberal principles and popular rights with a faithfulness and ability worthy of all praise

A young man, named Giovanni Guasconti, came, very long ago, from the more southern region of Italy, to pursue his studies at the University of Padua Giovanni, who had but a scanty supply of gold ducats in his pocket, took lodgings in a high and gloomy chamber of an old edifice which looked not unworthy to have been the palace of a Paduan noble, and which, in fact, exhibited over its entrance the armorial bearings of a family long since extinct The young stranger, who was not unstudied in the great poem of his country, recollected that one of the ancestors of this family, and perhaps an occupant of this very mansion, had been pictured by Dante as a partaker of the immortal agonies of his *Inferno* These reminiscences and associations, together with the tendency to heartbreak natural to a young man for the first time out of his native sphere, caused Giovanni to sigh heavily as he looked around the desolate and ill furnished apartment

'Holy Virgin, signor!' cried old Dame Lisabetta,

who, won by the youth's remarkable beauty of person, was kindly endeavouring to give the chamber a habitable air, ' what a sigh was that to come out of a young man's heart ! ' Do you find this old mansion gloomy ? For the love of Heaven, then, put your head out of the window, and you will see as bright sunshine as you have left in Naples '

Guasconti mechanically did as the old woman advised, but could not quite agree with her that the Paduan sunshine was as cheerful as that of Southern Italy. Such as it was, however, it fell upon a garden beneath the window and expended its fostering influences on a variety of plants, which seemed to have been cultivated with exceeding care.

' Does this garden belong to the house ? ' asked Giovanni.

' Heaven forbid, signor, unless it were fruitful of better pot herbs than any that grow there now,' answered old Lisabetta. ' No, that garden is cultivated by the own hands of Signor Giacomo Rappaccini, the famous doctor, who, I warrant him, has been heard of as far as Naples. It is said that he distils these plants into medicines that are as potent as a charm. Oftentimes you may see the signor doctor at work, and perchance the signora, his daughter, too, gathering the strange flowers that grow in the garden '.

The old woman had now done what she could for the aspect of the chamber, and, commending the young man to the protection of the saints, took her departure.

Giovanni still found no better occupation than to look down into the garden beneath his window. From its appearance, he judged it to be one of those botanic gardens which were of earlier date in Padua than elsewhere in Italy or in the world. Or, not improbably, it might once have been the pleasure place of an opulent family, for there was the ruin of a marble fountain in the centre, sculptured with rare art, but so wofully

shattered that it was impossible to trace the original design from the chaos of remaining fragments. The water, however, continued to gush and sparkle into the sunbeams as cheerfully as ever. A little gurgling sound ascended to the young man's window and made him feel as if the fountain were an immortal spirit, that sung its song unceasingly and without heeding the vicissitudes around it, while one century embodied it in marble and another scattered the perishable garniture on the soil. All about the pool into which the water subsided grew various plants, that seemed to require a plentiful supply of moisture for the nourishment of gigantic leaves, and, in some instances, flowers gorgeously magnificent. There was one shrub in particular, set in a marble vase in the midst of the pool, that bore a profusion of purple blossoms, each of which had the lustre and richness of a gem, and the whole together made a show so resplendent, that it seemed enough to illuminate the garden, even had there been no sunshine. Every portion of the soil was peopled with plants and herbs, which, if less beautiful, still bore tokens of assiduous care, as if all had their individual virtues, known to the scientific mind that fostered them. Some were placed in urns, rich with old carving, and others in common garden pots, some crept serpent like along the ground or climbed on high, using whatever means of ascent was offered them. One plant had wreathed itself round a statue of Vertumnus, which was thus quite veiled and shrouded in a drapery of hanging foliage, so happily arranged that it might have served a sculptor for a study.

While Giovanni stood at the window he heard a rustling behind a screen of leaves, and became aware that a person was at work in the garden. His figure soon emerged into view, and showed itself to be that of no common labourer, but a tall, emaciated, sallow, and sickly looking man, dressed in a scholar's garb of black. He was beyond the middle term of life, with grey hair, a



thin, grey beard, and a face singularly marked with intellect and cultivation, but which could never, even in his more youthful days, have expressed much warmth of heart

Nothing could exceed the intentness with which this scientific gardener examined every shrub which grew in his path it seemed as if he was looking into their inmost nature, making observations in regard to their creative essence, and discovering why one leaf grew in this shape and another in that, and wherefore such and such flowers differed among themselves in hue and perfume Nevertheless, in spite of this deep intelligence on his part, there was no approach to intimacy between himself and these vegetable existences On the contrary, he avoided their actual touch or the direct inhaling of their odours with a caution that impressed Giovanni most disagreeably, for the man's demeanour was that of one walking among malignant influences, such as savage beasts, or deadly snakes, or evil spirits, which, should he allow them one moment of license, would wreak upon him some terrible fatality It was strangely frightful to the young man's imagination to see this air of insecurity in a person cultivating a garden, that most simple and innocent of human toils, and which had been alike the joy and labour of the unfallen parents of the race Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world? And this man, with such a perception of harm in what his own hands caused to grow—was he the Adam?

The distrustful gardener, while plucking away the dead leaves or pruning the too luxuriant growth of the shrubs, defended his hands with a pair of thick gloves Nor were these his only armour When, in his walk through the garden, he came to the magnificent plant that hung its purple gems beside the marble fountain, he placed a kind of mask over his mouth and nostrils, as if all this beauty did but conceal a deadlier malice, but, finding his task still too dangerous, he drew back,

removed the mask, and called loudly, but in the infirm voice of a person affected with inward disease—

‘Beatrice! Beatrice!’

‘Here am I, my father!’ What would you?’ cried a rich and youthful voice from the window of the opposite house—a voice as rich as a tropical sunset, and which made Giovanni, though he knew not why, think of deep hues of purple or crimson and of perfumes heavily delectable ‘Are you in the garden?’

‘Yes, Beatrice,’ answered the gardener, ‘and I need your help’

Soon there emerged from under a sculptured portal the figure of a young girl, arrayed with as much richness of taste as the most splendid of the flowers, beautiful as the day, and with a bloom so deep and vivid that one shade more would have been too much. She looked redundant with life, health, and energy, all of which attributes were bound down and compressed, as it were, and girdled tensely, in their luxuriance, by her virgin zone. Yet Giovanni’s fancy must have grown morbid while he looked down into the garden, for the impression which the fair stranger made upon him was as if here were another flower, the human sister of those vegetable ones, as beautiful as they, more beautiful than the richest of them, but still to be touched only with a glove, nor to be approached without a mask. As Beatrice came down the garden path, it was observable that she handled and inhaled the odour of several of the plants which her father had most sedulously avoided.

‘Here, Beatrice,’ said the latter, ‘see how many needful offices require to be done to our chief treasure. Yet, shattered as I am, my life might pay the penalty of approaching it so closely as circumstances demand. Henceforth, I fear, this plant must be consigned to your sole charge.’

‘And gladly will I undertake it,’ cried again the rich tones of the young lady, as she bent towards the magni-

ficient plant and opened her arms as if to embrace it ' Yes, my sister, my splendour, it shall be Beatrice's task to nurse and serve thee , and thou shalt reward her with thy kisses and perfumed breath, which to her is as the breath of life '

Then, with all the tenderness in her manner that was so strikingly expressed in her words, she busied herself with such attentions as the plant seemed to require , and Giovanni, at his lofty window, rubbed his eyes, and almost doubted whether it were a girl tending her favourite flower, or one sister performing the duties of affection to another The scene soon terminated Whether Dr Rappaccini had finished his labours in the garden, or that his watchful eye had caught the stranger's face, he now took his daughter's arm and retired Night was already closing in , oppressive exhalations seemed to proceed from the plants and steal upward past the open window , and Giovanni, closing the lattice, went to his couch and dreamed of a rich flower and beautiful girl Flower and maiden were different, and yet the same, and fraught with some strange peril in either shape

But there is an influence in the light of morning that tends to rectify whatever errors of fancy, or even of judgement, we may have incurred during the sun's decline, or among the shadows of the night, or in the less wholesome glow of moonshine Giovanni's first movement, on starting from sleep, was to throw open the window and gaze down into the garden which his dreams had made so fertile of mysteries He was surprised, and a little ashamed, to find how real and matter of fact an affair it proved to be, in the first rays of the sun which gilded the dewdrops that hung upon leaf and blossom, and, while giving a brighter beauty

tion It would serve, he said to himself, as a symbolic language to keep him in communion with nature Neither the sickly and thought worn Dr Giacomo Rappaccini, it is true, nor his brilliant daughter, were now visible, so that Giovanni could not determine how much of the singularity which he attributed to both was due to their own qualities and how much to his wonder working fancy, but he was inclined to take a most rational view of the whole matter

In the course of the day he paid his respects to Signor Pietro Baglioni, professor of medicine in the university, a physician of eminent repute, to whom Giovanni had brought a letter of introduction The professor was an elderly personage, apparently of genial nature and habits that might almost be called jovial He kept the young man to dinner, and made himself very agreeable by the freedom and liveliness of his conversation, especially when warmed by a flask or two of Tuscan wine Giovanni, conceiving that men of science, inhabitants of the same city, must needs be on familiar terms with one another, took an opportunity to mention the name of Dr Rappaccini But the professor did not respond with so much cordiality as he had anticipated

'Ill would it become a teacher of the divine art of medicine,' said Professor Pietro Baglioni, in answer to a question of Giovanni, 'to withhold due and well considered praise of a physician so eminently skilled as Rappaccini, but, on the other hand, I should answer it but scantily to my conscience were I to permit a worthy youth like yourself, Signor Giovanni, the son of an ancient friend, to imbibe erroneous ideas respecting a man who might hereafter chance to hold your life and death in his hands The truth is, our worshipful Dr Rappaccini has as much science as any member of the faculty—with perhaps one single exception—in Padua, or all Italy, but there are certain grave objections to his professional character'

'And what are they?' asked the young man

'Has my friend Giovanni any disease of body or heart, that he is so inquisitive about physicians?' said the professor, with a smile. 'But as for Rappaccini, it is said of him—and I, who know the man well, can answer for its truth—that he cares infinitely more for science than for mankind. His patients are interesting to him only as subjects for some new experiment. He would sacrifice human life, his own among the rest, or whatever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustard seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge.'

'Methinks he is an awful man indeed,' remarked Guasconti, mentally recalling the cold and purely intellectual aspect of Rappaccini. 'And yet, worshipful professor, is it not a noble spirit? Are there many men capable of so spiritual a love of science?'

'God forbid,' answered the professor, somewhat testily, 'at least, unless they take sounder views of the healing art than those adopted by Rappaccini. It is his theory that all medicinal virtues are comprised within those substances which we term vegetable poisons. These he cultivates with his own hands, and is said even to have produced new varieties of poison more horribly deleterious than nature, without the assistance of this learned person, would ever have plagued the world withal. That the signor doctor does less mischief than might be expected with such dangerous substances, is undeniable. Now and then, it must be owned, he has effected, or seemed to effect, a marvellous cure, but, to tell you my private mind, Signor Giovanni, he should receive little credit for such instances of success—they being probably the work of chance—but should be held strictly accountable for his failures, which might justly be considered his own work.'

The youth might have taken Baghioni's opinions with many grans of allowance had he known that there was a professional warfare of long continuance between him

and Dr Rappaccini, in which the latter was generally thought to have gained the advantage. If the reader be inclined to judge for himself, we refer him to certain black letter tracts on both sides, preserved in the medical department of the University of Padua.

'I know not, most learned professor,' returned Giovanni, after musing on what had been said of Rappaccini's exclusive zeal for science—'I know not how dearly this physician may love his art, but surely there is one object more dear to him. He has a daughter.'

'Aha!' cried the professor, with a laugh. 'So now our friend Giovanni's secret is out. You have heard of this daughter, whom all the young men in Padua are wild about, though not half a dozen have ever had the good hap to see her face. I know little of the Signora Beatrice save that Rappaccini is said to have instructed her deeply in his science, and that, young and beautiful as fame reports her, she is already qualified to fill a professor's chair. Perchance her father destines her for mine! Other absurd rumours there be, not worth talking about or listening to. So now, Signor Giovanni, drink off your glass of lachryma.'

Guasconti returned to his lodgings somewhat heated with the wine he had quaffed, and which caused his brain to swim with strange fantasies in reference to Dr Rappaccini and the beautiful Beatrice. On his way, happening to pass by a florist's, he bought a fresh bouquet of flowers.

Ascending to his chamber, he seated himself near the window, but within the shadow thrown by the depth of the wall, so that he could look down into the garden with little risk of being discovered. All beneath his eye was a solitude. The strange plants were basking in the sunshine, and now and then nodding gently to one another, as if in acknowledgement of sympathy and kindred. In the midst, by the shattered fountain, grew the magnificent shrub, with its purple gems clustering all over it, they glowed in the air, and gleamed back

again out of the depths of the pool, which thus seemed to overflow with coloured radiance from the rich reflection that was steeped in it. At first, as we have said, the garden was a solitude. Soon, however—as Giovanni had half hoped, half feared, would be the case—a figure appeared beneath the antique sculptured portal, and came down between the rows of plants, inhaling their various perfumes as if she were one of those beings of old classic fable that lived upon sweet odours. On again beholding Beatrice, the young man was even startled to perceive how much her beauty exceeded his recollection of it, so brilliant, so vivid, was its character, that she glowed amid the sunlight, and, as Giovanni whispered to himself, positively illuminated the more shadowy intervals of the garden path. Her face being now more revealed than on the former occasion, he was struck by its expression of simplicity and sweetness—qualities that had not entered into his idea of her character, and which made him ask anew what manner of mortal she might be. Nor did he fail again to observe, or imagine, an analogy between the beautiful girl and the gorgeous shrub that hung its gem-like flowers over the fountain—a resemblance which Beatrice seemed to have indulged a fantastic humour in heightening, both by the arrangement of her dress and the selection of its hues.

Approaching the shrub, she threw open her arms, as with a passionate ardour, and drew its branches into an intimate embrace—so intimate that her features were hidden in its leafy bosom and her glistening ringlets all intermingled with the flowers.

‘Give me thy breath, my sister,’ exclaimed Beatrice, ‘for I am faint with common air. And give me this flower of thine, which I separate with gentlest fingers from the stem and place it close beside my heart.’

With these words the beautiful daughter of Rappaccini plucked one of the richest blossoms of the shrub, and was about to fasten it in her bosom. But now, unless

Giovanni's draughts of wine had bewildered his senses, a singular incident occurred. A small orange coloured reptile, of the lizard or chameleon species, chanced to be creeping along the path, just at the feet of Beatrice. It appeared to Giovanni—but, at the distance from which he gazed, he could scarcely have seen anything so minute—it appeared to him, however, that a drop or two of moisture from the broken stem of the flower descended upon the lizard's head. For an instant the reptile contorted itself violently, and then lay motionless in the sunshine. Beatrice observed this remarkable phenomenon, and crossed herself, sadly, but without surprise, nor did she therefore hesitate to arrange the fatal flower in her bosom. There it blushed, and almost glimmered with the dazzling effect of a precious stone, adding to her dress and aspect the one appropriate charm which nothing else in the world could have supplied. But Giovanni, out of the shadow of his window, bent forward and shrank back, and murmured and trembled.

'Am I awake? Have I my senses?' said he to himself. 'What is this being? Beautiful shall I call her, or inexpressibly terrible?'

Beatrice now strayed carelessly through the garden, approaching closer beneath Giovanni's window, so that he was compelled to thrust his head quite out of its concealment in order to gratify the intense and painful curiosity which she excited. At this moment there came a beautiful insect over the garden wall. It had, perhaps, wandered through the city, and found no flowers or verdure among those antique haunts of men until the heavy perfumes of Dr. Rappaccini's shrubs had lured it from afar. Without alighting on the flowers, this winged brightness seemed to be attracted by Beatrice, and lingered in the air and fluttered about her head. Now, here it could not be but that Giovanni Guasconti's eyes deceived him. Be that as it might, he fancied that, while Beatrice was gazing at the insect with childish



delight, it grew faint and fell at her feet, its bright wings shivered, it was dead—from no cause that he could discern, unless it were the atmosphere of her breath. Again Beatrice crossed herself and sighed heavily as she bent over the dead insect.

An impulsive movement of Giovanni drew her eyes to the window. There she beheld the beautiful head of the young man—rather a Grecian than an Italian head, with fair, regular features, and a glistening of gold among his ringlets—gazing down upon her like a being that hovered in mid air. Scarcely knowing what he did, Giovanni threw down the bouquet which he had hitherto held in his hand.

‘Signora,’ said he, ‘they are pure and healthful flowers. Wear them for the sake of Giovanni Guasconti.’

‘Thanks, signor,’ replied Beatrice, with her rich voice, that came forth as it were like a gush of music, and with a mirthful expression half childish and half woman like. ‘I accept your gift, and would fain recompense it with this precious purple flower, but, if I toss it into the air, it will not reach you. So Signor Guasconti must even content himself with my thanks.’

She lifted the bouquet from the ground, and then, as if inwardly ashamed at having stepped aside from her maidenly reserve to respond to a stranger’s greeting, passed swiftly homeward through the garden. But, few as the moments were, it seemed to Giovanni, when she was on the point of vanishing beneath the sculptured portal, that his beautiful bouquet was already beginning to wither in her grasp. It was an idle thought, there could be no possibility of distinguishing a faded flower from a fresh one at so great a distance.

For many days after this incident the young man avoided the window that looked into Dr Rappaccini’s garden, as if something ugly and monstrous would have blasted his eyesight had he been betrayed into a glance. He felt conscious of having put himself, to a certain

extent, within the influence of an unintelligible power by the communication which he had opened with Beatrice. The wisest course would have been, if his heart were in any real danger, to quit his lodgings and Padua itself at once, the next wiser, to have accustomed himself, as far as possible, to the familiar and daylight view of Beatrice—thus bringing her rigidly and systematically within the limits of ordinary experience. Least of all, while avoiding her sight, ought Giovanni to have remained so near this extraordinary being that the proximity and possibility even of intercourse should give a kind of substance and reality to the wild vagaries which his imagination ran riot continually in producing. Guasconti had not a deep heart—or, at all events, its depths were not sounded now, but he had a quick fancy, and an ardent Southern temperament, which rose every instant to a higher fever pitch. Whether or no Beatrice possessed those terrible attributes, that fatal breath, the affinity with those so beautiful and deadly flowers, which were indicated by what Giovanni had witnessed, she had at least instilled a fierce and subtle poison into his system. It was not love, although her rich beauty was a madness to him, nor horror, even while he fancied her spirit to be imbued with the same baneful essence that seemed to pervade her physical frame, but a wild offspring of both love and horror that had each parent in it, and burned like one and shivered like the other. Giovanni knew not what to dread, still less did he know what to hope, yet hope and dread kept a continual warfare in his breast, alternately vanquishing one another and starting up afresh to renew the contest. Blessed are all simple emotions, be they dark or bright! It is the lurid intermixture of the two that produces the illuminating blaze of the infernal regions.

Sometimes he endeavoured to assuage the fever of his spirit by a rapid walk through the streets of Padua or beyond its gates. his footsteps kept time with the

throbbings of his brain, so that the walk was apt to accelerate itself to a race. One day he found himself arrested, his arm was seized by a portly personage, who had turned back on recognizing the young man and expended much breath in overtaking him.

'Signor Giovanni! Stay, my young friend!' cried he. 'Have you forgotten me? That might well be the case if I were as much altered as yourself.'

It was Baghioni, whom Giovanni had avoided ever since their first meeting, from a doubt that the professor's sagacity would look too deeply into his secrets. Endeavouring to recover himself, he stared forth wildly from his inner world into the outer one and spoke like a man in a dream.

'Yes, I am Giovanni Guasconti. You are Professor Pietro Baghioni. Now let me pass!'

'Not yet, not yet, Signor Giovanni Guasconti,' said the professor, smiling, but at the same time scrutinizing the youth with an earnest glance. 'What! did I grow up side by side with your father? and shall his son pass me like a stranger in these old streets of Padua? Stand still, Signor Giovanni, for we must have a word or two before we part.'

'Speedily, then, most worshipful professor, speedily,' said Giovanni, with feverish impatience. 'Does not your worship see that I am in haste?'

Now, while he was speaking there came a man in black along the street, stooping and moving feebly, like a person in inferior health. His face was all overspread with a most sickly and sallow hue, but yet so pervaded with an expression of piercing and active intellect that an observer might easily have overlooked the merely physical attributes and have seen only this wonderful energy. As he passed, this person exchanged a cold and distant salutation with Baghioni, but fixed his eyes upon Giovanni with an intentness that seemed to bring out whatever was within him worthy of notice. Nevertheless, there was a peculiar quietness in the look, as if

taking merely a speculative, not a human, interest in the young man

'It is Dr Rappaccini,' whispered the professor when the stranger had passed 'Has he ever seen your face before?'

'Not that I know,' answered Giovanni, starting at the name

'He *has* seen you! he must have seen you!' said Baglioni, hastily 'For some purpose or other, this man of science is making a study of you I know that look of his' It is the same that coldly illuminates his face as he bends over a bird, a mouse, or a butterfly, which, in pursuance of some experiment, he has killed by the perfume of a flower, a look as deep as nature itself, but without nature's warmth of love Signor Giovanni, I will stake my life upon it, you are the subject of one of Rappaccini's experiments!'

'Will you make a fool of me?' cried Giovanni, passionately 'That, signor professor, were an untoward experiment'

'Patience! patience!' replied the imperturbable professor 'I tell thee, my poor Giovanni, that Rappaccini has a scientific interest in thee Thou hast fallen into fearful hands! And the Signora Beatrice—what part does she act in this mystery?'

But Guasconti, finding Baglioni's pertinacity intolerable, here broke away, and was gone before the professor could again seize his arm He looked after the young man intently and shook his head

'This must not be,' said Baglioni to himself 'The youth is the son of my old friend, and shall not come to any harm from which the arcana of medical science can preserve him Besides, it is too insufferable an impertinence in Rappaccini thus to snatch the lad out of my own hands, as I may say, and make use of him for his infernal experiments This daughter of his! It shall be looked to Perchance, most learned Rappaccini, I may foil you where you little dream of it!'

Meanwhile Giovanni had pursued a circuitous route, and at length found himself at the door of his lodgings. As he crossed the threshold he was met by old Lisabetta, who smirked and smiled, and was evidently desirous to attract his attention, vainly, however, as the ebullition of his feelings had momentarily subsided into a cold and dull vacuity. He turned his eyes full upon the withered face that was puckering itself into a smile, but seemed to behold it not. The old dame, therefore, laid her grasp upon his cloak.

'Signor! signor!' whispered she, still with a smile over the whole breadth of her visage, so that it looked not unlike a grotesque carving in wood, darkened by centuries. 'Listen, signor! There is a private entrance into the garden!'

'What do you say?' exclaimed Giovanni, turning quickly about, as if an inanimate thing should start into feverish life. 'A private entrance into Dr Rappaccini's garden?'

'Hush! hush! not so loud!' whispered Lisabetta, putting her hand over his mouth. 'Yes, into the worshipful doctor's garden, where you may see all his fine shrubbery. Many a young man in Padua would give gold to be admitted among those flowers.'

Giovanni put a piece of gold into her hand.

'Show me the way,' said he.

A surmise, probably excited by his conversation with Baghoni, crossed his mind, that this interposition of old Lisabetta might perchance be connected with the intrigue whatever were its nature, in which the professor seemed to suppose that Dr Rappaccini was involving him. But such a suspicion, though it disturbed Giovanni, was inadequate to restrain him. The instant that he was aware of the possibility of approaching Beatrice, it seemed an absolute necessity of his existence to do so. It mattered not whether she were angel or demon, he was irrevocably within her sphere, and must obey the law that whirled him onward, in ever lessening

circles, towards a result which he did not attempt to foreshadow, and yet, strange to say, there came across him a sudden doubt whether this intense interest on his part was not delusory, whether it were really of so deep and positive a nature as to justify him in now thrusting himself into an incalculable position, whether it were not merely the fantasy of a young man's brain, only slightly or not at all connected with his heart

He paused, hesitated, turned half about, but again went on. His withered guide led him along several obscure passages, and finally undid a door, through which, as it was opened, there came the sight and sound of rustling leaves, with the broken sunshine glimmering among them. Giovanni stepped forth, and, forcing himself through the entanglement of a shrub that wreathed its tendrils over the hidden entrance, stood beneath his own window in the open area of Dr Rappaccini's garden.

How often is it the case that, when impossibilities have come to pass, and dreams have condensed their misty substance into tangible realities, we find ourselves calm, and even coldly self possessed, amid circumstances which it would have been a delirium of joy or agony to anticipate! Fate delights to thwart us thus. Passion will choose his own time to rush upon the scene, and lingers sluggishly behind when an appropriate adjustment of events would seem to summon his appearance. So was it now with Giovanni. Day after day his pulses had throbbed with feverish blood at the improbable idea of an interview with Beatrice, and of standing with her, face to face, in this very garden, basking in the Oriental sunshine of her beauty, and snatching from her full gaze the mystery which he deemed the riddle of his own existence. But now there was a singular and untimely equanimity within his breast. He threw a glance around the garden to discover if Beatrice or her father were present, and, per-

ceiving that he was alone, began a critical observation of the plants

The aspect of one and all of them dissatisfied him, their gorgeoussness seemed fierce, passionate, and even unnatural. There was hardly an individual shrub which a wanderer, straying by himself through a forest, would not have been startled to find growing wild, as if an unearthly face had glared at him out of the thicket. Several also would have shocked a delicate instinct by an appearance of artificialness indicating that there had been such commixture, and, as it were, adultery of various vegetable species, that the production was no longer of God's making, but the monstrous offspring of man's depraved fancy, glowing with only an evil mockery of beauty. They were probably the result of experiment, which in one or two cases had succeeded in mingling plants individually lovely into a compound possessing the questionable and ominous character that distinguished the whole growth of the garden. In fine, Giovanni recognized but two or three plants in the collection, and those of a kind that he well knew to be poisonous. While busy with these contemplations he heard the rustling of a silken garment, and, turning, beheld Beatrice emerging from beneath the sculptured portal.

Giovanni had not considered with himself what should be his deportment, whether he should apologize for his intrusion into the garden, or assume that he was there with the privy at least, if not by the desire, of Dr Rappaccini or his daughter, but Beatrice's manner placed him at his ease, though leaving him still in doubt by what agency he had gained admittance. She came lightly along the path, and met him near the broken fountain. There was surprise in her face, but brightened by a simple and kind expression of pleasure.

'You are a connoisseur in flowers, signor,' said Beatrice, with a smile, alluding to the bouquet which he had flung her from the window. 'It is no marvel, there-

fore, if the sight of my father's rare collection has tempted you to take a nearer view. If he were here he could tell you many strange and interesting facts as to the nature and habits of these shrubs, for he has spent a lifetime in such studies, and this garden is his world.

'And yourself, lady,' observed Giovanni, 'if fame says true, you likewise are deeply skilled in the virtues indicated by these rich blossoms and these spicy perfumes. Would you deign to be my instructress, I should prove an apter scholar than if taught by Signor Rappaccini himself.'

'Are there such idle rumours?' asked Beatrice, with the music of a pleasant laugh. 'Do people say that I am skilled in my father's science of plants? What a jest is there! No, though I have grown up among these flowers, I know no more of them than their hues and perfume, and sometimes methinks I would fain rid myself of even that small knowledge. There are many flowers here, and those not the least brilliant, that shock and offend me when they meet my eye. But pray, signor, do not believe these stories about my science. Believe nothing of me save what you see with your own eyes.'

'And must I believe all that I have seen with my own eyes?' asked Giovanni, pointedly, while the recollection of former scenes made him shrink. 'No, signora, you demand too little of me. Bid me believe nothing save what comes from your own lips.'

It would appear that Beatrice understood him. There came a deep flush to her cheek, but she looked full into Giovanni's eyes, and responded to his gaze of uneasy suspicion with a queen-like haughtiness.

'I do so bid you, signor,' she replied. 'Forget whatever you may have fancied in regard to me. If true to the outward senses, still it may be false in its essence, but the words of Beatrice Rappaccini's lips are true from the depths of the heart outward. Those you may believe.'



A fervour glowed in her whole aspect, and beamed upon Giovanni's consciousness like the light of truth itself, but while she spoke there was a fragrance in the atmosphere around her, rich and delightful, though evanescent, yet which the young man, from an indefinable reluctance, scarcely dared to draw into his lungs. It might be the odour of the flowers. Could it be Beatrice's breath which thus embalmed her words with a strange richness, as if by steeping them in her heart? A faintness passed like a shadow over Giovanni and flitted away, he seemed to gaze through the beautiful girl's eyes into her transparent soul, and felt no more doubt or fear.

The tinge of passion that had coloured Beatrice's manner vanished, she became gay, and appeared to derive a pure delight from her communion with the youth not unlike what the maiden of a lonely island might have felt conversing with a voyager from the civilized world. Evidently her experience of life had been confined within the limits of that garden. She talked now about matters as simple as the daylight or summer clouds, and now asked questions in reference to the city, or Giovanni's distant home, his friends, his mother, and his sisters—questions indicating such seclusion, and such lack of familiarity with modes and forms, that Giovanni responded as if to an infant. Her spirit gushed out before him like a fresh rill that was just catching its first glimpse of the sunlight and wondering at the reflections of earth and sky which were flung into its bosom. There came thoughts, too, from a deep source, and fantasies of a gem-like brilliancy, as if diamonds and rubies sparkled upward among the bubbles of the fountain. Ever and anon there gleamed across the young man's mind a sense of wonder that he should be walking side by side with the being who had so wrought upon his imagination, whom he had idealized in such hues of terror, in whom he had positively witnessed such manifestations of dreadful attributes—

that he should be conversing with Beatrice like a brother, and should find her so human and so maiden like. But such reflections were only momentary, the effect of her character was too real not to make itself familiar at once.

In this free intercourse they had strayed through the garden, and now, after many turns among its avenues, were come to the shattered fountain, beside which grew the magnificent shrub, with its treasury of glowing blossoms. A fragrance was diffused from it which Giovanni recognized as identical with that which he had attributed to Beatrice's breath, but incomparably more powerful. As her eyes fell upon it, Giovanni beheld her press her hand to her bosom as if her heart were throbbing suddenly and painfully.

'For the first time in my life,' murmured she, addressing the shrub, 'I had forgotten thee.'

'I remember, signora,' said Giovanni, 'that you once promised to reward me with one of these living gems for the bouquet which I had the happy boldness to fling to your feet. Permit me now to pluck it as a memorial of this interview.'

He made a step towards the shrub with extended hand, but Beatrice darted forward, uttering a shriek that went through his heart like a dagger. She caught his hand and drew it back with the whole force of her slender figure. Giovanni felt her touch thrilling through his fibres.

'Touch it not!' exclaimed she, in a voice of agony. 'Not for thy life! It is fatal!'

Then, hiding her face, she fled from him and vanished beneath the sculptured portal. As Giovanni followed her with his eyes, he beheld the emaciated figure and pale intelligence of Dr. Rappaccini, who had been watching the scene, he knew not how long, within the shadow of the entrance.

No sooner was Guasconti alone in his chamber than the image of Beatrice came back to his passionate

musings, invested with all the witchery that had been gathering around it ever since his first glimpse of her, and now likewise imbued with a tender warmth of girlish womanhood. She was human, her nature was endowed with all gentle and feminine qualities, she was worthiest to be worshipped, she was capable, surely, on her part, of the height and heroism of love. Those tokens which he had hitherto considered as proofs of a frightful peculiarity in her physical and moral system were now either forgotten or by the subtle sophistry of passion transmitted into a golden crown of enchantment, rendering Beatrice the more admirable by so much as she was the more unique. Whatever had looked ugly was now beautiful, or, if incapable of such a change, it stole away and hid itself among those shapeless half ideas which throng the dim region beyond the daylight of our perfect consciousness. Thus did he spend the night, nor fell asleep until the dawn had begun to awake the slumbering flowers in Dr Rappaccini's garden, whither Giovanni's dreams doubtless led him. Up rose the sun in his due season, and, flinging his beams upon the young man's eyelids, awoke him to a sense of pain. When thoroughly aroused, he became sensible of a burning and tingling agony in his hand—in his right hand—the very hand which Beatrice had grasped in her own when he was on the point of plucking one of the gem like flowers. On the back of that hand there was now a purple print like that of four small fingers, and the likeness of a slender thumb upon his wrist.

Oh, how stubbornly does love—or even that cunning semblance of love which flourishes in the imagination, but strikes no depth of root into the heart—how stubbornly does it hold its faith until the moment comes when it is doomed to vanish into thin mist! Giovanni wrapped a handkerchief about his hand and wondered what evil thing had stung him, and soon forgot his pain in a reverie of Beatrice.

After the first interview, a second was in the inevitable course of what we call fate. A third, a fourth, and a meeting with Beatrice in the garden was no longer an incident in Giovanni's daily life, but the whole space in which he might be said to live, for the anticipation and memory of that ecstatic hour made up the remainder. Nor was it otherwise with the daughter of Rappaccini. She watched for the youth's appearance and flew to his side with confidence as unreserved as if they had been playmates from early infancy—as if they were such playmates still. If, by any unwonted chance, he failed to come at the appointed moment, she stood beneath the window and sent up the rich sweetness of her tones to float around him in his chamber and echo and reverberate throughout his heart. 'Giovanni! Giovanni! Why tarriest thou? Come down!' And down he hastened into that Eden of poisonous flowers.

But, with all this intimate familiarity, there was still a reserve in Beatrice's demeanour, so rigidly and invariably sustained, that the idea of infringing it scarcely occurred to his imagination. By all appreciable signs, they loved, they had looked love with eyes that conveyed the holy secret from the depths of one soul into the depths of the other, as if it were too sacred to be whispered by the way, they had even spoken love in those gushes of passion when their spirits darted forth in articulated breath like tongues of long hidden flame, and yet there had been no seal of lips, no clasp of hands, nor any slightest caress such as love claims and hallows. He had never touched one of the gleaming ringlets of her hair, her garment—so marked was the physical barrier between them—had never been waved against him by a breeze. On the few occasions when Giovanni had seemed tempted to overstep the limit, Beatrice grew so sad, so stern, and withal wore such a look of desolate separation, shuddering at itself, that not a spoken word was requisite to repel him. At such times he was startled at the horrible suspicions that

rose, monster like, out of the caverns of his heart and stared him in the face, his love grew thin and faint as the morning mist, his doubts alone had substance. But, when Beatrice's face brightened again after the momentary shadow, she was transformed at once from the mysterious, questionable being whom he had watched with so much awe and horror, she was now the beautiful and unsophisticated girl whom he felt that his spirit knew with a certainty beyond all other knowledge.

A considerable time had now passed since Giovanni's last meeting with Baghoni. One morning, however, he was disagreeably surprised by a visit from the professor, whom he had scarcely thought of for whole weeks, and would willingly have forgotten still longer. Given up as he had long been to a pervading excitement, he could tolerate no companions except upon condition of their perfect sympathy with his present state of feeling. Such sympathy was not to be expected from Professor Baghoni.

The visitor chatted carelessly for a few moments about the gossip of the city and the university, and then took up another topic.

'I have been reading an old classic author lately,' said he, 'and met with a story that strangely interested me. Possibly you may remember it. It is of an Indian prince, who sent a beautiful woman as a present to Alexander the Great. She was as lovely as the dawn and gorgeous as the sunset, but what especially distinguished her was a certain rich perfume in her breath—richer than a garden of Persian roses. Alexander, as was natural to a youthful conqueror, fell in love at first sight with this magnificent stranger, but a certain sage physician, happening to be present, discovered a terrible secret in regard to her.'

'And what was that?' asked Giovanni, turning his eyes downward, to avoid those of the professor.

'That this lovely woman,' continued Baghoni, with

emphasis, 'had been nourished with poisons from her birth upward, until her whole nature was so imbued with them that she herself had become the deadliest poison in existence. Poison was her element of life. With that rich perfume of her breath she blasted the very air. Her love would have been poison—her embrace death. Is not this a marvellous tale?'

'A childish fable,' answered Giovanni, nervously starting from his chair. 'I marvel how your worship finds time to read such nonsense among your graver studies.'

'By the by,' said the professor, looking uneasily about him, 'what singular fragrance is this in your apartment? Is it the perfume of your gloves? It is faint, but delicious, and yet, after all, by no means agreeable. Were I to breathe it long, methinks it would make me ill. It is like the breath of a flower, but I see no flowers in the chamber.'

'Nor are there any,' replied Giovanni, who had turned pale as the professor spoke, 'nor, I think, is there any fragrance, except in your worship's imagination. Odours, being a sort of element combined of the sensual and the spiritual, are apt to deceive us in this manner. The recollection of a perfume, the bare idea of it, may easily be mistaken for a present reality.'

'Ay, but my sober imagination does not often play such tricks,' said Baghoni, 'and, were I to fancy any kind of odour, it would be that of some vile apothecary drug, wherewith my fingers are likely enough to be imbued. Our worshipful friend Rappaccini, as I have heard, tinctures his medicaments with odours richer than those of Araby. Doubtless, likewise, the fair and learned Signora Beatrice would minister to her patients with draughts as sweet as a maiden's breath, but woe to him that sips them!'

Giovanni's face evinced many contending emotions. The tone in which the professor alluded to the pure and lovely daughter of Rappaccini was a torture to his soul,

and yet the intimation of a view of her character, opposite to his own, gave instantaneous distinctness to a thousand dim suspicions, which now grinned at him like so many demons. But he strove hard to quell them and to respond to Baghoni with a true lover's perfect faith.

'Signor professor,' said he, 'you were my father's friend, perchance, too, it is your purpose to act a friendly part towards his son. I would fain feel nothing towards you save respect and deference, but I pray you to observe, signor, that there is one subject on which we must not speak. You know not the Signora Beatrice. You cannot, therefore, estimate the wrong—the blasphemy, I may even say—that is offered to her character by a light or injurious word.'

'Giovanni! my poor Giovanni!' answered the professor, with a calm expression of pity, 'I know this wretched girl far better than yourself. You shall hear the truth in respect to the poisoner Rappaccini and his poisonous daughter, yes, poisonous as she is beautiful. Listen, for, even should you do violence to my grey hairs, it shall not silence me. That old fable of the Indian woman has become a truth by the deep and deadly science of Rappaccini and in the person of the lovely Beatrice.'

Giovanni groaned and hid his face.

'Her father,' continued Baghoni, 'was not restrained by natural affection from offering up his child in this horrible manner as the victim of his insane zeal for science, for, let us do him justice, he is as true a man of science as ever distilled his own heart in an alembic. What, then, will be your fate? Beyond a doubt you are selected as the material of some new experiment. Perhaps the result is to be death, perhaps a fate more awful still. Rappaccini, with what he calls the interest of science before his eyes, will hesitate at nothing.'

'It is a dream,' muttered Giovanni to himself, 'surely it is a dream.'

'But,' resumed the professor, 'be of good cheer, son of my friend. It is not yet too late for the rescue. Possibly we may even succeed in bringing back this miserable child within the limits of ordinary nature, from which her father's madness has estranged her. Behold this little silver vase! It was wrought by the hands of the renowned Benvenuto Cellini, and is well worthy to be a love gift to the fairest dame in Italy. But its contents are invaluable. One little sip of this antidote would have rendered the most virulent poisons of the Borgias innocuous. Doubt not that it will be as efficacious against those of Rappaccini. Bestow the vase, and the precious liquid within it, on your Beatrice, and hopefully await the result.'

Baghioni laid a small, exquisitely wrought silver vial on the table and withdrew, leaving what he had said to produce its effect upon the young man's mind.

'We will thwart Rappaccini yet,' thought he, chuckling to himself as he descended the stairs, 'but, let us confess the truth of him, he is a wonderful man—a wonderful man indeed, a vile empiric, however, in his practice, and therefore not to be tolerated by those who respect the good old rules of the medical profession.'

Throughout Giovanni's whole acquaintance with Beatrice, he had occasionally, as we have said, been haunted by dark surmises as to her character, yet so thoroughly had she made herself felt by him as a simple, natural, most affectionate, and guileless creature, that the image now held up by Professor Baghioni looked as strange and incredible as if it were not in accordance with his own original conception. True, there were ugly recollections connected with his first glimpses of the beautiful girl, he could not quite forget the bouquet that withered in her grasp, and the insect that perished amid the sunny air, by no ostensible agency save the fragrance of her breath. These incidents, however, dissolving in the pure light of her character, had no longer the efficacy of facts but were acknowledged as



mistaken fantasies, by whatever testimony of the senses they might appear to be substantiated. There is something truer and more real than what we can see with the eyes and touch with the finger. On such better evidence had Giovanni founded his confidence in Beatrice, though rather by the necessary force of her high attributes than by any deep and generous faith on his part. But now his spirit was incapable of sustaining itself at the height to which the early enthusiasm of passion had exalted it, he fell down, grovelling among earthly doubts, and defiled therewith the pure whiteness of Beatrice's image. Not that he gave her up, he did but distrust. He resolved to institute some decisive test that should satisfy him, once for all, whether there were those dreadful peculiarities in her physical nature which could not be supposed to exist without some corresponding monstrosity of soul. His eyes, gazing down afar, might have deceived him as to the lizard, the insect, and the flowers, but if he could witness, at the distance of a few paces, the sudden blight of one fresh and healthful flower in Beatrice's hand, there would be room for no further question. With this idea he hastened to the florist's and purchased a bouquet that was still gemmed with the morning dewdrops.

It was now the customary hour of his daily interview with Beatrice. Before descending into the garden, Giovanni failed not to look at his figure in the mirror—a vanity to be expected in a beautiful young man, yet, as displaying itself at that troubled and feverish moment, the token of a certain shallowness of feeling and insincerity of character. He did gaze, however, and said to himself that his features had never before possessed so rich a grace, nor his eyes such vivacity, nor his cheeks so warm a hue of superabundant life.

'At least,' thought he, 'her poison has not yet insinuated itself into my system. I am no flower to perish in her grasp.'

With that thought he turned his eyes on the bouquet,

which he had never once laid aside from his hand. A thrill of indefinable horror shot through his frame on perceiving that these dewy flowers were already beginning to droop, they wore the aspect of things that had been fresh and lovely yesterday. Giovanni grew white as marble, and stood motionless before the mirror, staring at his own reflection there as at the likeness of something frightful. He remembered Baghoni's remark about the fragrance that seemed to pervade the chamber. It must have been the poison in his breath! Then he shuddered—shuddered at himself. Recovering from his stupor, he began to watch with curious eye a spider that was busily at work hanging its web from the antique cornice of the apartment, crossing and recrossing the artful system of interwoven lines—as vigorous and active a spider as ever dangled from an old ceiling. Giovanni bent towards the insect, and emitted a deep, long breath. The spider suddenly ceased its toil, the web vibrated with a tremor originating in the body of the small artisan. Again Giovanni sent forth a breath, deeper, longer, and imbued with a venomous feeling out of his heart—he knew not whether he were wicked, or only desperate. The spider made a convulsive grip with his limbs and hung dead across the window.

'Accursed! accursed!' muttered Giovanni, addressing himself. 'Hast thou grown so poisonous that this deadly insect perishes by thy breath?'

At that moment a rich, sweet voice came floating up from the garden.

'Giovanni! Giovanni! It is past the hour! Why tarriest thou? Come down!'

'Yes,' muttered Giovanni again. 'She is the only being whom my breath may not slay! Would that it might!'

He rushed down, and in an instant was standing before the bright and loving eyes of Beatrice. A moment ago his wrath and despair had been so fierce that he could have desired nothing so much as to wither her by

a glance, but with her actual presence there came influences which had too real an existence to be at once shaken off, recollections of the delicate and benign power of her feminine nature, which had so often enveloped him in a religious calm, recollections of many a holy and passionate outgush of her heart, when the pure fountain had been unsealed from its depths and made visible in its transparency to his mental eye, recollections which, had Giovanni known how to estimate them, would have assured him that all this ugly mystery was but an earthly illusion, and that, whatever mist of evil might seem to have gathered over her, the real Beatrice was a heavenly angel. Incapable as he was of such high faith, still her presence had not utterly lost its magic. Giovanni's rage was quelled into an aspect of sullen insensibility. Beatrice, with a quick spiritual sense, immediately felt that there was a gulf of blackness between them which neither he nor she could pass. They walked on together, sad and silent, and came thus to the marble fountain and to its pool of water on the ground, in the midst of which grew the shrub that bore gem-like blossoms. Giovanni was affrighted at the eager enjoyment—the appetite, as it were—with which he found himself inhaling the fragrance of the flowers.

'Beatrice,' asked he, abruptly, 'whence came this shrub?'

'My father created it,' answered she, with simplicity.

'Created it! created it!' repeated Giovanni. 'What mean you, Beatrice?'

'He is a man fearfully acquainted with the secrets of nature,' replied Beatrice, 'and, at the hour when I first drew breath, this plant sprang from the soil, the offspring of his science, of his intellect, while I was but his earthly child. Approach it not!' continued she, observing with terror that Giovanni was drawing nearer to the shrub. 'It has qualities that you little dream of. But I, dearest Giovanni—I grew up and blossomed with

the plant and was nourished with its breath. It was my sister, and I loved it with a human affection, for, alas!—hast thou not suspected it?—there was an awful doom.’

Here Giovanni frowned so garkly upon her that Beatrice paused and trembled. But her faith in his tenderness reassured her, and made her blush that she had doubted for an instant.

‘There was an awful doom,’ she continued, ‘the effect of my father’s fatal love of science, which estranged me from all society of my kind. Until Heaven sent thee, dearest Giovanni, oh, how lonely was thy poor Beatrice!’

‘Was it a hard doom?’ asked Giovanni, fixing his eyes upon her.

‘Only of late have I known how hard it was,’ answered she, tenderly. ‘Oh yes, but my heart was torpid, and therefore quiet.’

Giovanni’s rage broke forth from his sullen gloom like a lightning flash out of a dark cloud.

‘Accursed one!’ cried he, with venomous scorn and anger. ‘And, finding thy solitude wearsome, thou hast severed me likewise from all the warmth of life and enticed me into thy region of unspeakable horror!’

‘Giovanni!’ exclaimed Beatrice, turning her large bright eyes upon his face. The force of his words had not found its way into her mind, she was merely thunderstruck.

‘Yes, poisonous thing!’ repeated Giovanni, beside himself with passion. ‘Thou hast done it! Thou hast blasted me! Thou hast filled my veins with poison! Thou hast made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself—a world’s wonder of hideous monstrosity! Now, if our breath be happily as fatal to ourselves as to all others, let us join our lips in one kiss of unutterable hatred, and so die!’

‘What has befallen me?’ murmured Beatrice, with a low moan out of her heart. ‘Holy Virgin, pity me, a poor heart broken child!’

‘Thou—dost thou pray?’ cried Giovanni, still with

the same fiendish scorn 'Thy very prayers, as they come from thy lips, taint the atmosphere with death Yes, yes, let us pray' Let us to church and dip our fingers in the holy water at the portal! They that come after us will perish as by a pestilence' Let us sign crosses in the air' It will be scattering curses abroad in the likeness of holy symbols'

'Giovanni,' said Beatrice, calmly, for her grief was beyond passion, 'why dost thou join thyself with me thus in those terrible words? I, it is true, am the horrible thing thou namest me But thou—what hast thou to do, save with one other shudder at my hideous misery to go forth out of the garden and mingle with thy race, and forget that there ever crawled on earth such a monster as poor Beatrice?'

'Dost thou pretend ignorance?' asked Giovanni, scowling upon her 'Behold! this power have I gained from the pure daughter of Rappaccini'

There was a swarm of summer insects flitting through the air in search of the food promised by the flower-odours of the fatal garden They circled round Giovanni's head, and were evidently attracted towards him by the same influence which had drawn them for an instant within the sphere of several of the shrubs He sent forth a breath among them, and smiled bitterly at Beatrice as at least a score of the insects fell dead upon the ground

'I see it' I see it!' shrieked Beatrice 'It is my father's fatal science! No, no, Giovanni, it was not I' Never! never! I dreamed only to love thee and be with thee a little time, and so to let thee pass away, leaving but thine image in mine heart, for, Giovanni, believe it, though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God's creature, and craves love as its daily food But my father—he has united us in this fearful sympathy Yes, spurn me, tread upon me, kill me! Oh, what is death after such words as thine? But it was not I. Not for a world of bliss would I have done it'

Giovanni's passion had exhausted itself in its outburst from his lips. There now came across him a sense, mournful, and not without tenderness, of the intimate and peculiar relationship between Beatrice and himself. They stood, as it were, in an utter solitude, which would be made none the less solitary by the densest throng of human life. Ought not, then, the desert of humanity around them to press this insulated pair closer together? If they should be cruel to one another, who was there to be kind to them? Besides, thought Giovanni, might there not still be a hope of his returning within the limits of ordinary nature, and leading Beatrice, the redeemed Beatrice, by the hand? O weak and selfish and unworthy spirit, that could dream of an earthly union and earthly happiness as possible, after such deep love had been so bitterly wronged as was Beatrice's love by Giovanni's blighting words! No, no, there could be no such hope. She must pass heavily, with that broken heart, across the borders of Time, she must bathe her hurts in some fount of paradise, and forget her grief in the light of immortality, and *there* be well.

But Giovanni did not know it.

'Dear Beatrice,' said he, approaching her, while she shrank away as always at his approach, but now with a different impulse—'dearest Beatrice, our fate is not yet so desperate. Behold! there is a medicine, potent, as a wise physician has assured me, and almost divine in its efficacy. It is composed of ingredients the most opposite to those by which thy awful father has brought this calamity upon thee and me. It is distilled of blessed herbs. Shall we not quaff it together, and thus be purified from evil?'

'Give it to me!' said Beatrice, extending her hand to receive the little silver vial which Giovanni took from his bosom. She added, with a peculiar emphasis, 'I will drink, but do thou await the result.'

She put Baghom's antidote to her lips, and, at the

same moment, the figure of Rappaccini emerged from the portal and came slowly towards the marble fountain. As he drew near, the pale man of science seemed to gaze with a triumphant expression at the beautiful youth and maiden, as might an artist who should spend his life in achieving a picture or a group of statuary and finally be satisfied with his success. He paused, his bent form grew erect with conscious power, he spread out his hands over them in the attitude of a father imploring a blessing upon his children, but those were the same hands that had thrown poison into the stream of their lives. Giovanni trembled. Beatrice shuddered nervously, and pressed her hand upon her heart.

'My daughter,' said Rappaccini, 'thou art no longer lonely in the world. Pluck one of those precious gems from thy sister shrub and bid thy bridegroom wear it in his bosom. It will not harm him now. My science and the sympathy between thee and him have so wrought within his system that he now stands apart from common men, as thou dost, daughter of my pride and triumph, from ordinary women. Pass on, then, through the world, most dear to one another and dreadful to all besides!'

'My father,' said Beatrice, feebly—and still as she spoke she kept her hand upon her heart—'wherefore didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child?'

'Miserable!' exclaimed Rappaccini. 'What mean you, foolish girl? Dost thou deem it misery to be endowed with marvellous gifts against which no power nor strength could avail an enemy—misery, to be able to quell the mightiest with a breath—misery, to be as terrible as thou art beautiful? Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil and capable of none?'

'I would fain have been loved, not feared,' murmured Beatrice, sinking down upon the ground. 'But now it matters not. I am going, rather, where the evil which thou hast striven to mingle with my being will pass

away like a dream—like the fragrance of these poisonous flowers, which will no longer taint my breath among the flowers of Eden Farewell, Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart, but they, too, will fall away as I ascend Oh, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?’

To Beatrice—so rapidly had her earthly part been wrought upon by Rappaccini’s skill—as poison had been life, so the powerful antidote was death, and thus the poor victim of man’s ingenuity and of thwarted nature, and of the fatality that attends all such efforts of perverted wisdom, perished there, at the feet of her father and Giovanni Just at that moment Professor Pietro Baghioni looked forth from the window, and called loudly, in a tone of triumph mixed with horror, to the thunder stricken man of science—

‘Rappaccini! Rappaccini! and is *this* the upshot of your experiment?’

### EDWARD RANDOLPH’S PORTRAIT

[From *Twice Told Tales* 1851]

THE old legendary guest of the Province House abode in my remembrance from midsummer till January One idle evening, last winter, confident that he would be found in the snuggest corner of the bar room, I resolved to pay him another visit, hoping to deserve well of my country by snatching from oblivion some else unheard of fact of history The night was chill and raw, and rendered boisterous by almost a gale of wind, which whistled along Washington Street, causing the gaslights to flare and flicker within the lamps As I hurried onward, my fancy was busy with a comparison between the present aspect of the street, and that which it probably wore when the British governors inhabited the mansion whither I was now going Brick edifices in those times were few, till a succession of destructive fires had swept, and swept again, the wooden dwellings and warehouses



from the most populous quarters of the town. The buildings stood insulated and independent, not, as now, merging their separate existences into connected ranges, with a front of tiresome identity, but each possessing features of its own, as if the owner's individual taste had shaped it, and the whole presenting a picturesque irregularity, the absence of which is hardly compensated by any beauties of our modern architecture. Such a scene, dimly vanishing from the eye by the ray of here and there a tallow candle, glimmering through the small panes of scattered windows, would form a sombre contrast to the street as I beheld it, with the gaslights blazing from corner to corner, flaming within the shops, and throwing a noonday brightness through the huge plates of glass.

But the black, lowering sky, as I turned my eyes upward, wore, doubtless, the same visage as when it frowned upon the ante Revolutionary New Englanders. The wintry blast had the same shriek that was familiar to their ears. The Old South Church, too, still pointed its antique spire into the darkness, and was lost between earth and heaven, and as I passed, its clock, which had warned so many generations how transitory was their lifetime, spoke heavily and slow the same unregarded moral to myself. 'Only seven o'clock,' thought I. 'My old friend's legends will scarcely kill the hours 'twixt this and bedtime.'

Passing through the narrow arch, I crossed the courtyard, the confined precincts of which were made visible by a lantern over the portal of the Province House. On entering the bar room, I found, as I expected, the old tradition monger seated by a special good fire of anthracite, compelling clouds of smoke from a corpulent cigar. He recognized me with evident pleasure, for my rare properties as a patient listener invariably make me a favourite with elderly gentlemen and ladies of narrative propensities. Drawing a chair to the fire, I desired mine host to favour us with a glass apiece of whisky punch,

which was speedily prepared, steaming hot, with a slice of lemon at the bottom, a dark red stratum of port wine upon the surface, and a sprinkling of nutmeg strewn over all. As we touched our glasses together, my legendary friend made himself known to me as Mr. Bela Tiffany, and I rejoiced at the oddity of the name, because it gave his image and character a sort of individuality in my conception. The old gentleman's draught acted as a solvent upon his memory, so that it overflowed with tales, traditions, anecdotes of famous dead people, and traits of ancient manners, some of which were childish as a nurse's lullaby, while others might have been worth the notice of the grave historian. Nothing impressed me more than a story of a black mysterious picture, which used to hang in one of the chambers of the Province House, directly above the room where we were now sitting. The following is as correct a version of the fact as the reader would be likely to obtain from any other source, although, assuredly, it has a tinge of romance approaching to the marvellous.

In one of the apartments of the Province House there was long preserved an ancient picture, the frame of which was as black as ebony, and the canvas itself so dark with age, damp, and smoke, that not a touch of the painter's art could be discerned. Time had thrown an impenetrable veil over it, and left to tradition and fable and conjecture to say what had once been there portrayed. During the rule of many successive governors it had hung, by prescriptive and undisputed right, over the mantelpiece of the same chamber, and it still kept its place when Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson assumed the administration of the province, on the departure of Sir Francis Bernard.

The Lieutenant-Governor sat, one afternoon, resting his head against the carved back of his stately arm-chair, and gazing up thoughtfully at the void blackness

of the picture It was scarcely a time for such inactive musing, when affairs of the deepest moment required the ruler's decision, for, within that very hour, Hutchinson had received intelligence of the arrival of a British fleet, bringing three regiments from Halifax to overawe the insubordination of the people These troops awaited his permission to occupy the fortress of Castle William and the town itself Yet, instead of affixing his signature to an official order, there sat the Lieutenant-Governor, so carefully scrutinizing the black waste of canvas, that his demeanour attracted the notice of two young persons who attended him One, wearing a military dress of buff, was his kinsman, Francis Lincoln, the Provincial Captain of Castle William, the other, who sat on a low stool beside his chair, was Alice Vane, his favourite niece

She was clad entirely in white, a pale, ethereal creature, who, though a native of New England, had been educated abroad, and seemed not merely a stranger from another clime, but almost a being from another world For several years, until left an orphan, she had dwelt with her father in sunny Italy, and there had acquired a taste and enthusiasm for sculpture and painting, which she found few opportunities of gratifying in the undecorated dwellings of the colonial gentry It was said that the early productions of her own pencil exhibited no inferior genius, though, perhaps, the rude atmosphere of New England had cramped her hand and dimmed the glowing colours of her fancy But observing her uncle's steadfast gaze, which appeared to search through the mist of years to discover the subject of the picture, her curiosity was excited

'Is it known, my dear uncle,' inquired she, 'what this old picture once represented? Possibly, could it be made visible, it might prove a masterpiece of some great artist, else, why has it so long held such a conspicuous place?'

As her uncle, contrary to his usual custom (for he

was as attentive to all the humours and caprices of Alice as if she had been his own best beloved child), did not immediately reply, the young captain of Castle William took that office upon himself

'This dark old square of canvas, my fair cousin,' said he, 'has been an heirloom in the Province House from time immemorial. As to the painter, I can tell you nothing, but if half the stories told of it be true, not one of the great Italian masters has ever produced so marvellous a piece of work as that before you'

Captain Lincoln proceeded to relate some of the strange fables and fantasies, which, as it was impossible to refute them by ocular demonstration, had grown to be articles of popular belief, in reference to this old picture. One of the wildest, and at the same time the best accredited accounts, stated it to be an original and authentic portrait of the Evil One, taken at a witch meeting near Salem, and that its strong and terrible resemblance had been confirmed by several of the confessing wizards and witches, at their trial, in open court. It was likewise affirmed that a familiar spirit, or demon, abode behind the blackness of the picture, and had shown himself, at seasons of public calamity, to more than one of the royal governors. Shirley, for instance, had beheld this ominous apparition, on the eve of General Abercrombie's shameful and bloody defeat under the walls of Ticonderoga. Many of the servants of the Province House had caught glimpses of a visage frowning down upon them, at morning or evening twilight, or in the depths of night, while raking up the fire that glimmered on the hearth beneath, although, if any were bold enough to hold a torch before the picture, it would appear as black and undistinguishable as ever. The oldest inhabitant of Boston recollected that his father, in whose days the portrait had not wholly faded out of sight, had once looked upon it, but would never suffer himself to be questioned as to the face which was there represented. In connexion with such stories,

it was remarkable that over the top of the frame there were some ragged remnants of black silk, indicating that a veil had formerly hung down before the picture, until the duskiness of time had so effectually concealed it. But, after all, it was the most singular part of the affair, that so many of the pompous governors of Massachusetts had allowed the obliterated picture to remain in the state chamber of the Province House.

'Some of these fables are really awful,' observed Alice Vane, who had occasionally shuddered, as well as smiled, while her cousin spoke. 'It would be almost worth while to wipe away the black surface of the canvas, since the original picture can hardly be so formidable as those which fancy paints instead of it.'

'But would it be possible,' inquired her cousin, 'to restore this dark picture to its pristine hues?'

'Such arts are known in Italy,' said Alice.

The Lieutenant Governor had roused himself from his abstracted mood, and listened with a smile to the conversation of his young relatives. Yet his voice had something peculiar in its tones, when he undertook the explanation of the mystery.

'I am sorry, Alice, to destroy your faith in the legends of which you are so fond,' remarked he, 'but my antiquarian researches have long since made me acquainted with the subject of this picture—if picture it can be called—which is no more visible, nor ever will be, than the face of the long-buried man whom it once represented. It was the portrait of Edward Randolph, the founder of this house, a person famous in the history of New England.'

'Of that Edward Randolph,' exclaimed Captain Lincoln, 'who obtained the repeal of the first provincial charter, under which our forefathers had enjoyed almost democratic privileges! He that was styled the arch-enemy of New England, and whose memory is still held in detestation, as the destroyer of our liberties!'

'It was the same Randolph,' answered Hutchinson,

moving uneasily in his chair 'It was his lot to taste the bitterness of popular odium'

'Our annals tell us,' continued the Captain of Castle William, 'that the curse of the people followed this Randolph where he went, and wrought evil in all the subsequent events of his life, and that its effect was seen likewise in the manner of his death. They say, too, that the inward misery of that curse worked itself outward, and was visible on the wretched man's countenance, making it too horrible to be looked upon. If so, and if this picture truly represented his aspect, it was in mercy that the cloud of blackness has gathered over it.'

'These traditions are folly, to one who has proved, as I have, how little of historic truth lies at the bottom,' said the Lieutenant Governor. 'As regards the life and character of Edward Randolph, too implicit credence has been given to Dr Cotton Mather, who—I must say it, though some of his blood runs in my veins—has filled our early history with old women's tales, as fanciful and extravagant as those of Greece or Rome.'

'And yet,' whispered Alice Vane, 'may not such fables have a moral? And, methinks, if the visage of this portrait be so dreadful, it is not without a cause that it has hung so long in a chamber of the Province House. When the rulers feel themselves irresponsible, it were well that they should be reminded of the awful weight of a people's curse.'

The Lieutenant Governor started, and gazed for a moment at his niece, as if her girlish fantasies had struck upon some feeling in his own breast, which all his policy or principles could not entirely subdue. He knew, indeed, that Alice, in spite of her foreign education, retained the native sympathies of a New England girl.

'Peace, silly child,' cried he, at last, more harshly than he had ever before addressed the gentle Alice. 'The rebuke of a king is more to be dreaded than the

clamour of a wild, misguided multitude Captain Lincoln, it is decided The fortress of Castle William must be occupied by the Royal troops The two remaining regiments shall be billeted in the town, or encamped upon the Common It is time, after years of tumult, and almost rebellion, that his Majesty's government should have a wall of strength about it'

'Trust, sir—trust yet awhile to the loyalty of the people,' said Captain Lincoln, 'nor teach them that they can ever be on other terms with British soldiers than those of brotherhood, as when they fought side by side through the French war Do not convert the streets of your native town into a camp Think twice before you give up old Castle William, the key of the province, into other keeping than that of true born New Englanders'

'Young man, it is decided,' repeated Hutchinson, rising from his chair 'A British officer will be in attendance this evening to receive the necessary instructions for the disposal of the troops Your presence also will be required Till then, farewell'

With these words the Lieutenant Governor hastily left the room, while Alice and her cousin more slowly followed, whispering together, and once pausing to glance back at the mysterious picture The Captain of Castle William fancied that the girl's air and mien were such as might have belonged to one of those spirits of fable—fairies, or creatures of a more antique mythology—who sometimes mingled their agency with mortal affairs, half in caprice, yet with a sensibility to human weal or woe As he held the door for her to pass, Alice beckoned to the picture and smiled

'Come forth, dark and evil Shape!' cried she 'It is thine hour!'

In the evening, Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson sat in the same chamber where the foregoing scene had occurred, surrounded by several persons whose various interests had summoned them together There were the selectmen of Boston, plain, patriarchal fathers of

the people, excellent representatives of the old puritanical founders, whose sombre strength had stamped so deep an impress upon the New England character. Contrasting with these were one or two members of Council, richly dressed in the white wigs, the embroidered waistcoats, and other magnificence of the time, and making a somewhat ostentatious display of courtier like ceremonial. In attendance, likewise, was a major of the British army, awaiting the Lieutenant Governor's orders for the landing of the troops, which still remained on board the transports. The Captain of Castle Wilham stood beside Hutchinson's chair, with folded arms, glancing rather haughtily at the British officer, by whom he was soon to be superseded in his command. On a table, in the centre of the chamber, stood a branched silver candlestick, throwing down the glow of half a dozen wax lights upon a paper apparently ready for the Lieutenant Governor's signature.

Partly shrouded in the voluminous folds of one of the window curtains, which fell from the ceiling to the floor, was seen the white drapery of a lady's robe. It may appear strange that Alice Vane should have been there, at such a time, but there was something so childlike, so wayward, in her singular character, so apart from ordinary rules, that her presence did not surprise the few who noticed it. Meantime, the chairman of the selectmen was addressing to the Lieutenant-Governor a long and solemn protest against the reception of the British troops into the town.

'And if your Honour,' concluded this excellent but somewhat prosy old gentleman, 'shall see fit to persist in bringing these mercenary swordsmen and musketeers into our quiet streets, not on our heads be the responsibility. Think, sir, while there is yet time, that if one drop of blood be shed, that blood shall be an eternal stain upon your Honour's memory. You, sir, have written, with an able pen, the deeds of our forefathers. The more to be desired is it, therefore, that yourself



should deserve honourable mention, as a true patriot and upright ruler, when your own doings shall be written down in history'

'I am not insensible, my good sir, to the natural desire to stand well in the annals of my country,' replied Hutchinson, controlling his impatience into courtesy, 'nor know I any better method of attaining that end than by withstanding the merely temporary spirit of mischief, which, with your pardon, seems to have infected elder men than myself. Would you have me wait till the mob shall sack the Province House, as they did my private mansion? Trust me, sir, the time may come when you will be glad to flee for protection to the King's banner, the raising of which is now so distasteful to you.'

'Yes,' said the British major, who was impatiently expecting the Lieutenant-Governor's orders. 'The demagogues of this province have raised the devil, and cannot lay him again. We will exorcise him, in God's name and the King's.'

'If you meddle with the Devil, take care of his claws!' answered the Captain of Castle William, stirred by the taunt against his countrymen.

'Craving your pardon, young sir,' said the venerable selectman, 'let not an evil spirit enter into your words. We will strive against the oppressor with prayer and fasting, as our forefathers would have done. Like them, moreover, we will submit to whatever lot a wise Providence may send us,—always, after our own best exertions to amend it.'

'And there peep forth the Devil's claws!' muttered Hutchinson, who well understood the nature of Puritan submission. 'This matter shall be expedited forthwith. When there shall be a sentinel at every corner, and a court of guard before the town house, a loyal gentleman may venture to walk abroad. What to me is the outcry of a mob, in this remote province of the realm? The King is my master, and England is my country! Upheld

by their armed strength, I set my foot upon the rabble, and defy them !'

He snatched a pen, and was about to affix his signature to the paper that lay on the table, when the Captain of Castle William placed his hand upon his shoulder. The freedom of the action, so contrary to the ceremonious respect which was then considered due to rank and dignity, awakened general surprise, and in none more than in the Lieutenant-Governor himself. Looking angrily up, he perceived that his young relative was pointing his finger to the opposite wall. Hutchinson's eye followed the signal, and he saw, what had hitherto been unobserved, that a black silk curtain was suspended before the mysterious picture, so as completely to conceal it. His thoughts immediately recurred to the scene of the preceding afternoon, and, in his surprise, confused by indistinct emotions, yet sensible that his niece must have had an agency in this phenomenon, he called loudly upon her.

'Alice !—come hither, Alice !'

No sooner had he spoken than Alice Vane glided from her station, and pressing one hand across her eyes, with the other snatched away the sable curtain that concealed the portrait. An exclamation of surprise burst from every beholder, but the Lieutenant Governor's voice had a tone of horror.

'By Heaven,' said he, in a low, inward murmur, speaking rather to himself than to those around him, 'if the spirit of Edward Randolph were to appear among us from the place of torment, he could not wear more of the terrors of hell upon his face !'

'For some wise end,' said the aged selectman, solemnly, 'hath Providence scattered away the mist of years that had so long hid this dreadful effigy. Until this hour no living man hath seen what we behold !'

Within the antique frame, which so recently had enclosed a sable waste of canvas, now appeared a visible picture, still dark, indeed, in its hues and shadings, but

thrown forward in strong relief. It was a half length figure of a gentleman in a rich, but very old fashioned dress of embroidered velvet, with a broad ruff and a beard, and wearing a hat, the brim of which overshadowed his forehead. Beneath this cloud the eyes had a peculiar glare which was almost life-like. The whole portrait started so distinctly out of the background, that it had the effect of a person looking down from the wall at the astonished and awe stricken spectators. The expression of the face, if any words can convey an idea of it, was that of a wretch detected in some hideous guilt, and exposed to the bitter hatred and laughter and withering scorn of a vast surrounding multitude. There was the struggle of defiance, beaten down and overwhelmed by the crushing weight of ignominy. The torture of the soul had come forth upon the countenance. It seemed as if the picture, while hidden behind the cloud of immemorial years, had been all the time acquiring an intenser depth and darkness of expression, till now it gloomed forth again, and threw its evil omen over the present hour. Such, if the wild legend may be credited, was the portrait of Edward Randolph, as he appeared when a people's curse had wrought its influence upon his nature.

'Twould drive me mad—that awful face!' said Hutchinson, who seemed fascinated by the contemplation of it.

'Be warned, then!' whispered Alice. 'He trampled on a people's rights. Behold his punishment—and avoid a crime like his!'

The Lieutenant Governor actually trembled for an instant, but, exerting his energy—which was not, however, his most characteristic feature—he strove to shake off the spell of Randolph's countenance.

'Girl!' cried he, laughing bitterly, as he turned to Alice, 'have you brought hither your painter's art—your Italian spirit of intrigue—your tricks of stage effect—and think to influence the councils of rulers and

the affairs of nations by such shallow contrivances ?  
See here !

'Stay yet awhile,' said the selectman, as Hutchinson again snatched the pen, 'for if ever mortal man received a warning from a tormented soul, your Honour is that man !'

'Away !' answered Hutchinson, fiercely 'Though yonder senseless picture cried, "Forbear !" it should not move me !'

Casting a scowl of defiance at the pictured face (which seemed, at that moment, to intensify the horror of its miserable and wicked look), he scrawled on the paper, in characters that betokened it a deed of desperation, the name of Thomas Hutchinson Then, it is said, he shuddered, as if that signature had granted away his salvation

'It is done,' said he, and placed his hand upon his brow

'May Heaven forgive the deed,' said the soft sad accents of Alice Vane, like the voice of a good spirit flitting away

When morning came there was a stifled whisper through the household, and spreading thence about the town, that the dark, mysterious picture had started from the wall, and spoken face to face with Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson If such a miracle had been wrought, however, no traces of it remained behind, for within the antique frame, nothing could be discerned, save the impenetrable cloud which had covered the canvas since the memory of man If the figure had, indeed, stepped forth, it had fled back, spirit-like, at the daydawn, and hidden itself behind a century's obscurity The truth probably was, that Alice Vane's secret for restoring the hues of the picture had merely effected a temporary renovation But those who, in that brief interval, had beheld the awful visage of Edward Randolph, desired no second glance, and ever afterwards trembled at the recollection of the scene, as

if an evil spirit had appeared visibly among them And as for Hutchinson, when, far over the ocean, his dying hour drew on, he gasped for breath, and complained that he was choking with the blood of the Boston massacre, and Francis Lincoln, the former Captain of Castle William, who was standing at his bedside, perceived a likeness in his frenzied look to that of Edward Randolph Did his broken spirit feel, at that dread hour, the tremendous burden of a People's curse ?

At the conclusion of this miraculous legend, I inquired of mine host whether the picture still remained in the chamber over our heads, but Mr Tiffany informed me that it had long since been removed, and was supposed to be hidden in some out-of-the way corner of the New England Museum Perchance some curious antiquary may light upon it there, and, with the assistance of Mr Howorth, the picture cleaner, may supply a not unnecessary proof of the authenticity of the facts here set down During the progress of the story a storm had been gathering abroad, and raging and rattling so loudly in the upper regions of the Province House, that it seemed as if all the old governors and great men were running riot above stairs, while Mr Bela Tiffany babbled of them below In the course of generations, when many people have lived and died in an ancient house, the whistling of the wind through its crannies, and the creaking of its beams and rafters, become strangely like the tones of the human voice, or thundering laughter, or heavy footsteps treading the deserted chambers It is as if the echoes of half a century were revived Such were the ghostly sounds that roared and murmured in our ears, when I took leave of the circle round the fire-side of the Province House, and plunging down the doorsteps, fought my way homeward against a drifting snow storm

( 'Legends of the Province House', II )

# EDGAR ALLAN POE

1809-1849

## MS FOUND IN A BOTTLE

[From *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* 1840]

Qui n'a plus qu'un moment à vivre  
N'a plus rien à dissimuler Quinault—*Atys*

OF my country and of my family I have little to say. Ill usage and length of years have driven me from the one, and estranged me from the other. Hereditary wealth afforded me an education of no common order, and a contemplative turn of mind enabled me to methodize the stores which early study diligently garnered up. Beyond all things, the works of the German moralists gave me great delight, not from my ill advised admiration of their eloquent madness, but from the ease with which my habits of rigid thought enabled me to detect their falsities. I have often been reproached with the aridity of my genius, a deficiency of imagination has been imputed to me as a crime, and the Pyrrhonism of my opinions has at all times rendered me notorious. Indeed, a strong relish for physical philosophy has, I fear, tinctured my mind with a very common error of this age—I mean the habit of referring occurrences, even the least susceptible of such reference, to the principles of that science. Upon the whole, no person could be less liable than myself to be led away from the severe precincts of truth by the *ignes fatui* of superstition. I have thought proper to premise thus much, lest the incredible tale I have to tell should be considered rather the raving of a crude imagination, than the positive experience of a mind to which the reveries of fancy have been a dead letter and a nullity.

After many years spent in foreign travel, I sailed in

the year 18—, from the port of Batavia, in the rich and populous island of Java, on a voyage to the Archipelago of the Sunda islands. I went as passenger—having no other inducement than a kind of nervous restlessness which haunted me as a fiend.

Our vessel was a beautiful ship of about four hundred tons, copper fastened, and built at Bombay of Malabar teak. She was freighted with cotton-wool and oil, from the Lachadive islands. We had also on board cori, jaggeree, ghee, coco nuts, and a few cases of opium. The stowage was clumsily done, and the vessel consequently crank.

We got under way with a mere breath of wind, and for many days stood along the eastern coast of Java, without any other incident to beguile the monotony of our course than the occasional meeting with some of the small grabs of the Archipelago to which we were bound.

One evening, leaning over the taffrail, I observed a very singular isolated cloud, to the N W. It was remarkable, as well for its colour, as from its being the first we had seen since our departure from Batavia. I watched it attentively until sunset, when it spread all at once to the eastward and westward, girting in the horizon with a narrow strip of vapour, and looking like a long line of low beach. My notice was soon afterwards attracted by the dusky red appearance of the moon, and the peculiar character of the sea. The latter was undergoing a rapid change, and the water seemed more than usually transparent. Although I could distinctly see the bottom, yet, heaving the lead, I found the ship in fifteen fathoms. The air now became intolerably hot, and was loaded with spiral exhalations similar to those arising from heated iron. As night came on, every breath of wind died away, and a more entire calm it is impossible to conceive. The flame of a candle burned upon the poop without the least perceptible motion, and a long hair, held between the finger and thumb,

hung without the possibility of detecting a vibration. However, as the captain said he could perceive no indication of danger, and as we were drifting in bodily to shore, he ordered the sails to be furled, and the anchor let go. No watch was set, and the crew, consisting principally of Malays, stretched themselves deliberately upon deck. I went below—not without a full presentiment of evil. Indeed, every appearance warranted me in apprehending a Simoon. I told the captain my fears, but he paid no attention to what I said, and left me without deigning to give a reply. My uneasiness, however, prevented me from sleeping, and about midnight I went upon deck. As I placed my foot upon the upper step of the companion-ladder, I was startled by a loud, humming noise like that occasioned by the rapid revolution of a mill wheel, and before I could ascertain its meaning, I found the ship quivering to its centre. In the next instant, a wilderness of foam hurled us upon our beam ends, and, rushing over us fore and aft, swept the entire decks from stem to stern.

The extreme fury of the blast proved, in a great measure, the salvation of the ship. Although completely waterlogged, yet, as her masts had gone by the board, she rose, after a minute, heavily from the sea, and, staggering awhile beneath the immense pressure of the tempest, finally righted.

By what miracle I escaped destruction, it is impossible to say. Stunned by the shock of the water, I found myself, upon recovery, jammed in between the stern post and rudder. With great difficulty I gained my feet, and looking dizzily around, was at first struck with the idea of our being among breakers, so terrific, beyond the wildest imagination was the whirlpool of mountainous and foaming ocean within which we were engulfed. After a while, I heard the voice of an old Swede, who had shipped with us at the moment of leaving port. I hallooed to him with all my strength, and presently he came reeling aft. We soon discovered



that we were the sole survivors of the accident. All on deck, with the exception of ourselves, had been swept overboard, the captain and mates must have perished as they slept, for the cabins were deluged with water. Without assistance, we could expect to do little for the security of the ship, and our exertions were at first paralyzed by the momentary expectation of going down. Our cable had, of course, parted like pack-thread, at the first breath of the hurricane, or we should have been instantaneously overwhelmed. We scudded with frightful velocity before the sea, and the water made clear breaches over us. The frame work of our stern was shattered excessively, and, in almost every respect, we had received considerable injury, but to our extreme joy we found the pumps unchoked, and that we had made no great shifting of our ballast. The main fury of the blast had already blown over, and we apprehended little danger from the violence of the wind, but we looked forward to its total cessation with dismay, well believing, that in our shattered condition, we should inevitably perish in the tremendous swell which would ensue. But this very just apprehension seemed by no means likely to be soon verified. For five entire days and nights—during which our only subsistence was a small quantity of jaggerie, procured with great difficulty from the fore-castle—the hulk flew at a rate defying computation, before rapidly succeeding flaws of wind, which without equalling the first violence of the Simoon, were still more terrific than any tempest I had before encountered. Our course for the first four days was, with trifling variations, S E and by S, and we must have run down the coast of New Holland. On the fifth day the cold became extreme, although the wind had hauled round a point more to the northward. The sun arose with a sickly yellow lustre, and clambered a very few degrees above the horizon—emitting no decisive light. There were no clouds apparent, yet the wind was upon the increase,

and blew with a fitful and unsteady fury About noon, as nearly as we could guess, our attention was again arrested by the appearance of the sun It gave out no light, properly so called, but a dull and sullen glow without reflection, as if all its rays were polarized Just before sinking within the turgid sea, its central fires suddenly went out, as if hurriedly extinguished by some unaccountable power It was a dim, silver-like rim, alone, as it rushed down the unfathomable ocean

We waited in vain for the arrival of the sixth day—that day to me has not arrived—to the Swede, never did arrive Thenceforward we were enshrouded in pitchy darkness, so that we could not have seen an object at twenty paces from the ship Eternal night continued to envelop us, all unrelieved by the phosphoric sea brilliancy to which we had been accustomed in the tropics We observed, too, that, although the tempest continued to rage with unabated violence, there was no longer to be discovered the usual appearance of surf, or foam, which had hitherto attended us All around were horror, and thick gloom, and a black sweltering desert of ebony Superstitious terror crept by degrees into the spirit of the old Swede, and my own soul was wrapped up in silent wonder We neglected all care of the ship, as worse than useless, and securing ourselves, as well as possible, to the stump of the mizen-mast, looked out bitterly into the world of ocean We had no means of calculating time, nor could we form any guess of our situation We were, however, well aware of having made farther to the southward than any previous navigators, and felt great amazement at not meeting with the usual impediments of ice In the meantime every moment threatened to be our last—every mountainous billow hurried to overwhelm us The swell surpassed anything I had imagined possible, and that we were not instantly buried is a miracle My companion spoke of the lightness of our cargo, and

reminded me of the excellent qualities of our ship, but I could not help feeling the utter hopelessness of hope itself, and prepared myself gloomily for that death which I thought nothing could defer beyond an hour, as, with every knot of way the ship made, the swelling of the black stupendous seas became more dismally appalling. At times we gasped for breath at an elevation beyond the albatross—at times became dizzy with the velocity of our descent into some watery hell, where the air grew stagnant, and no sound disturbed the slumbers of the kraken.

We were at the bottom of one of these abysses, when a quick scream from my companion broke fearfully upon the night. 'See! see!' cried he, shrieking in my ears, 'Almighty God! see! see!' As he spoke, I became aware of a dull, sullen glare of red light which streamed down the sides of the vast chasm where we lay, and threw a fitful brilliancy upon our deck. Casting my eyes upwards, I beheld a spectacle which froze the current of my blood. At a terrific height directly above us, and upon the very verge of the precipitous descent, hovered a gigantic ship, of perhaps four thousand tons. Although upreared upon the summit of a wave more than a hundred times her own altitude, her apparent size still exceeded that of any ship of the line or East Indiaman in existence. Her huge hull was of a deep dingy black, unrelieved by any of the customary carvings of a ship. A single row of brass cannon protruded from her open ports, and dashed from their polished surfaces the fires of innumerable battle lanterns, which swung to and fro about her rigging. But what mainly inspired us with horror and astonishment, was that she bore up under a press of sail in the very teeth of that supernatural sea, and of that ungovernable hurricane. When we first discovered her, her bows were alone to be seen, as she rose slowly from the dim and horrible gulf beyond her. For a moment of intense terror she paused upon the giddy pinnacle, as if in

contemplation of her own sublimity, then trembled and tottered, and—came down

At this instant, I know not what sudden self possession came over my spirit \* Staggering as far aft as I could, I awaited fearlessly the run that was to overwhelm Our own vessel was at length ceasing from her struggles, and sinking with her head to the sea The shock of the descending mass struck her, consequently, in that portion of her frame which was nearly under water, and the inevitable result was to hurl me, with irresistible violence, upon the rigging of the stranger

As I fell, the ship hove in stays, and went about, and to the confusion ensuing I attributed my escape from the notice of the crew With little difficulty I made my way, unperceived, to the main hatchway, which was partially open, and soon found an opportunity of secreting myself in the hold Why I did so I can hardly tell An indefinite sense of awe, which at first sight of the navigators of the ship had taken hold of my mind, was perhaps the principle of my concealment I was unwilling to trust myself with a race of people who had offered, to the cursory glance I had taken, so many points of vague novelty, doubt, and apprehension I therefore thought proper to contrive a hiding place in the hold This I did by removing a small portion of the shifting boards, in such a manner as to afford me a convenient retreat between the huge timbers of the ship

I had scarcely completed my work, when a footstep in the hold forced me to make use of it A man passed by my place of concealment with a feeble and unsteady gait I could not see his face, but had an opportunity of observing his general appearance There was about it an evidence of great age and infirmity His knees tottered beneath a load of years, and his entire frame quivered under the burthen He muttered to himself, in a low broken tone, some words of a language which I could not understand, and groped in a corner among

a pile of singular looking instruments, and decayed charts of navigation His manner was a wild mixture of the peevishness of second childhood and the solemn dignity of a God He at length went on deck, and I saw him no more

A feeling, for which I have no name, has taken possession of my soul—a sensation which will admit of no analysis, to which the lessons of by gone time are inadequate, and for which I fear futurity itself will offer me no key To a mind constituted like my own, the latter consideration is an evil I shall never—I know that I shall never—be satisfied with regard to the nature of my conceptions Yet it is not wonderful that these conceptions are indefinite, since they have their origin in sources so utterly novel A new sense—a new entity is added to my soul

It is long since I first trod the deck of this terrible ship, and the rays of my destiny are, I think gathering to a focus Incomprehensible men ' Wrapped up in meditations of a kind which I cannot divine, they pass me by unnoticed Concealment is utter folly on my part, for the people *will not* see It was but just now that I passed directly before the eyes of the mate, it was no long while ago that I ventured into the captain's own private cabin, and took thence the materials with which I write, and have written I shall from time to time continue this journal It is true that I may not find an opportunity of transmitting it to the world, but I will not fail to make the endeavour At the last moment I will enclose the MS in a bottle, and cast it within the sea

An incident has occurred which has given me new room for meditation Are such things the operation of ungoverned chance? I had ventured upon deck and thrown myself down, without attracting any notice,

among a pile of ratlin stuff and old sails, in the bottom of the yawl. While musing upon the singularity of my fate, I unwittingly daubed with a tar-brush the edges of a neatly folded studding sail which lay near me on a barrel. The studding sail is now bent upon the ship, and the thoughtless touches of the brush are spread out into the word DISCOVERY.

I have made many observations lately upon the structure of the vessel. Although well armed, she is not, I think, a ship of war. Her rigging, build, and general equipment, all negative a supposition of this kind. What she *is not*, I can easily perceive, what she *is*, I fear it is impossible to say. I know not how it is, but in scrutinizing her strange model and singular cast of spars, her huge size and overgrown suits of canvas, her severely simple bow and antiquated stern, there will occasionally flash across my mind a sensation of familiar things, and there is always mixed up with such indistinct shadows of recollection, an unaccountable memory of old foreign chronicles and ages long ago.

I have been looking at the timbers of the ship. She is built of a material to which I am a stranger. There is a peculiar character about the wood which strikes me as rendering it unfit for the purpose to which it has been applied. I mean its extreme *porousness*, considered independently of the worm eaten condition which is a consequence of navigation in these seas, and apart from the rottenness attendant upon age. It will appear perhaps an observation somewhat over curious, but this wood would have every characteristic of Spanish oak, if Spanish oak were distended by any unnatural means.

In reading the above sentence, a curious apothegm of an old weather beaten Dutch navigator comes full upon my recollection. 'It is as sure,' he was wont to say, when any doubt was entertained of his veracity, 'as sure as there is a sea where the ship itself will grow in bulk like the living body of the seaman' ...

About an hour ago, I made bold to trust myself among a group of the crew. They paid me no manner of attention, and, although I stood in the very midst of them all, seemed utterly unconscious of my presence. Like the one I had at first seen in the hold, they all bore about them the marks of a hoary old age. Their knees trembled with infirmity, their shoulders were bent double with decrepitude, their shrivelled skins rattled in the wind, their voices were low, tremulous, and broken, their eyes glistened with the rheum of years, and their grey hairs streamed terribly in the tempest. Around them, on every part of the deck, lay scattered mathematical instruments of the most quaint and obsolete construction.

I mentioned, some time ago, the bending of a studding sail. From that period, the ship, being thrown dead off the wind, has continued her terrific course due south, with every rag of canvas packed upon her, from her truck to her lower studding sail booms, and rolling every moment her topgallant yard arms into the most appalling hell of water which it can enter into the mind of man to imagine. I have just left the deck, where I find it impossible to maintain a footing, although the crew seem to experience little inconvenience. It appears to me a miracle of miracles that our enormous bulk is not swallowed up at once and for ever. We are surely doomed to hover continually upon the brink of eternity, without taking a final plunge into the abyss. From billows a thousand times more stupendous than any I have ever seen, we glide away with the facility of the arrowy sea gull, and the colossal waters rear their heads above us like demons of the deep, but like demons confined to simple threats, and forbidden to destroy. I am led to attribute these frequent escapes to the only natural cause which can account for such effect. I must suppose the ship to be within the influence of some strong current, or impetuous under-tow.

I have seen the captain face to face, and in his own

cabin—but, as I expected, he paid me no attention. Although in his appearance there is, to a casual observer, nothing which might bespeak him more or less than man, still, a feeling of irrepressible reverence and awe mingled with the sensation of wonder with which I regarded him. In stature, he is nearly my own height, that is, about five feet eight inches. He is of a well knit and compact frame of body, neither robust nor remarkable otherwise. But it is the singularity of the expression which reigns upon the face—it is the intense, the wonderful, the thrilling evidence of old age so utter, so extreme, which excites within my spirit a sense—a sentiment ineffable. His forehead, although little wrinkled, seems to bear upon it the stamp of a myriad of years. His grey hairs are records of the past, and his greyer eyes are sybils of the future. The cabin floor was thickly strewn with strange, iron clasped folios, and mouldering instruments of science, and obsolete long-forgotten charts. His head was bowed down upon his hands, and he pored, with a fiery, unquiet eye, over a paper which I took to be a commission, and which, at all events, bore the signature of a monarch. He muttered to himself—as did the first seaman whom I saw in the hold—some low peevish syllables of a foreign tongue, and although the speaker was close at my elbow, his voice seemed to reach my ears from the distance of a mile.

The ship and all in it are imbued with the spirit of Eld. The crew glide to and fro like the ghosts of buried centuries, their eyes have an eager and uneasy meaning, and when their figures fall athwart my path in the wild glare of the battle lanterns, I feel as I have never felt before, although I have been all my life a dealer in antiquities, and have imbibed the shadows of fallen columns at Balbec, and Tadmor, and Persepolis, until my very soul has become a ruin.

When I look around me, I feel ashamed of my former apprehensions. If I trembled at the blast which has



hitherto attended us, shall I not stand aghast at warring of wind and ocean, to convey any idea of which, the words tornado and simoon are trivial and ineffective? All in the immediate vicinity of the ship, is the blackness of eternal night, and a chaos of foamless water, but, about a league on either side of us, may be seen, indistinctly and at intervals, stupendous ram parts of ice, towering away into the desolate sky, and looking like the walls of the universe

As I imagined, the ship proves to be in a current—if that appellation can properly be given to a tide which, howling and shrieking by the white ice, thunders on to the southward with a velocity like the headlong dashing of a cataract

To conceive the horror of my sensations is, I presume, utterly impossible, yet a curiosity to penetrate the mysteries of these awful regions, predominates even over my despair, and will reconcile me to the most hideous aspect of death. It is evident that we are hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge—some never to be imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction. Perhaps this current leads us to the southern pole itself. It must be confessed that a supposition apparently so wild has every probability in its favour

The crew pace the deck with unquiet and tremulous step, but there is upon their countenance an expression more of the eagerness of hope than of the apathy of despair

In the meantime the wind is still in our poop, and, as we carry a crowd of canvas, the ship is at times lifted bodily from out the sea! Oh, horror upon horror!—the ice opens suddenly to the right, and to the left, and we are whirling dizzily, in immense concentric circles, round and round the borders of a gigantic amphitheatre, the summit of whose walls is lost in the darkness and the distance. But little time will be left me to ponder upon my destiny! The circles rapidly grow small—we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool—

and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and tempest, the ship is quivering—oh God! and——going down!

*Note*—The 'MS Found in a Bottle', was originally published in 1831 [actually in *Baltimore Saturday Visitor*, 19 Oct 1833], and it was not until many years afterwards that I became acquainted with the maps of Mercator, in which the ocean is represented as rushing by four mouths, into the (northern) Polar Gulf to be absorbed into the bowels of the earth, the Pole itself being represented by a black rock, towering to a prodigious height

# ELIZABETH CLEGHORN GASKELL

1810-1865

## THE OLD NURSE'S STORY

[From *Lizzie Leigh, and other Tales* 1855]

You know, my dears, that your mother was an orphan, and an only child, and I dare say you have heard that your grandfather was a clergyman up in Westmorland, where I come from. I was just a girl in the village school, when, one day, your grandmother came in to ask the mistress if there was any scholar there who would do for a nurse maid, and mighty proud I was, I can tell ye, when the mistress called me up, and spoke to my being a good girl at my needle, and a steady honest girl, and one whose parents were very respectable, though they might be poor. I thought I should like nothing better than to serve the pretty young lady, who was blushing as deep as I was, as she spoke of the coming baby, and what I should have to do with it. However, I see you don't care so much for this part of my story, as for what you think is to come, so I'll tell you at once. I was engaged and settled at the parsonage before Miss Rosamond (that was the baby, who is now your mother) was born. To be sure, I had little enough to do with her when she came, for she was never out of her mother's arms, and slept by her all night long, and proud enough was I sometimes when missis trusted her to me. There never was such a baby before or since, though you've all of you been fine enough in your turns, but for sweet, winning ways, you've none of you come up to your mother. She took after her mother, who was a real lady born, a Miss Furnivall, a granddaughter of Lord Furnivall's, in Northumberland. I believe she had neither brother

nor sister, and had been brought up in my lord's family till she had married your grandfather, who was just a curate, son to a shopkeeper in Carlisle—but a clever, fine gentleman as ever was—and one who was a right down hard worker in his parish, which was very wide, and scattered all abroad over the Westmorland Fells. When your mother, little Miss Rosamond, was about four or five years old, both her parents died in a fortnight—one after the other. Ah! that was a sad time. My pretty young mistress and me was looking for another baby, when my master came home from one of his long rides, wet, and tired, and took the fever he died of, and then she never held up her head again, but just lived to see her dead baby, and have it laid on her breast before she sighed away her life. My mistress had asked me, on her death bed, never to leave Miss Rosamond, but if she had never spoken a word, I would have gone with the little child to the end of the world.

The next thing, and before we had well stilled our sobs, the executors and guardians came to settle the affairs. They were my poor young mistress's own cousin, Lord Furnivall, and Mr Esthwaite, my master's brother, a shopkeeper in Manchester, not so well to do then as he was afterwards, and with a large family rising about him. Well! I don't know if it were their settling, or because of a letter my mistress wrote on her death bed to her cousin, my lord, but somehow it was settled that Miss Rosamond and me were to go to Furnivall Manor House, in Northumberland, and my lord spoke as if it had been her mother's wish that she should live with his family, and as if he had no objections, for that one or two more or less could make no difference in so grand a household. So, though that was not the way in which I should have wished the coming of my bright and pretty pet to have been looked at—who was like a sunbeam in any family, be it never so grand—I was well pleased that all the folks in the Dale should

stare and admire, when they heard I was going to be young lady's maid at my Lord Furnivall's at Furnivall Manor

But I made a mistake in thinking we were to go and live where my lord did. It turned out that the family had left Furnivall Manor House fifty years or more. I could not hear that my poor young mistress had ever been there, though she had been brought up in the family, and I was sorry for that, for I should have liked Miss Rosamond's youth to have passed where her mother's had been.

My lord's gentleman, from whom I asked as many questions as I durst, said that the Manor House was at the foot of the Cumberland Fells, and a very grand place, that an old Miss Furnivall, a great aunt of my lord's, lived there, with only a few servants, but that it was a very healthy place, and my lord had thought that it would suit Miss Rosamond very well for a few years, and that her being there might perhaps amuse his old aunt.

I was bidden by my lord to have Miss Rosamond's things ready by a certain day. He was a stern proud man, as they say all the Lords Furnivall were, and he never spoke a word more than was necessary. Folk did say he had loved my young mistress, but that, because she knew that his father would object, she would never listen to him, and married Mr Esthwaite, but I don't know. He never married at any rate. But he never took much notice of Miss Rosamond, which I thought he might have done if he had cared for her dead mother. He sent his gentleman with us to the Manor House, telling him to join him at Newcastle that same evening, so there was no great length of time for him to make us known to all the strangers before he, too, shook us off, and we were left, two lonely young things (I was not eighteen), in the great old Manor House. It seems like yesterday that we drove there. We had left our own dear parsonage very early, and we had both cried as if

our hearts would break, though we were travelling in my lord's carriage, which I thought so much of once. And now it was long past noon on a September day, and we stopped to change horses for the last time at a little smoky town, all full of colliers and miners. Miss Rosamond had fallen asleep, but Mr Henry told me to waken her, that she might see the park and the Manor House as we drove up. I thought it rather a pity, but I did what he bade me, for fear he should complain of me to my lord. We had left all signs of a town, or even a village, and were then inside the gates of a large wild park—not like the parks here in the south, but with rocks, and the noise of running water and gnarled thorn trees, and old oaks, all white and peeled with age.

The road went up about two miles, and then we saw a great and stately house, with many trees close around it, so close that in some places their branches dragged against the walls when the wind blew, and some hung broken down, for no one seemed to take much charge of the place,—to lop the wood, or to keep the moss covered carriage-way in order. Only in front of the house all was clear. The great oval drive was without a weed, and neither tree nor creeper was allowed to grow over the long, many windowed front, at both sides of which a wing projected, which were each the ends of other side fronts, for the house, although it was so desolate, was even grander than I expected. Behind it rose the Fells, which seemed unenclosed and bare enough, and on the left hand of the house, as you stood facing it, was a little, old fashioned flower-garden, as I found out afterwards. A door opened out upon it from the west front, it had been scooped out of the thick dark wood for some old Lady Furnivall, but the branches of the great forest trees had grown and overshadowed it again, and there were very few flowers that would live there at that time.

When we drove up to the great front entrance, and went into the hall I thought we should be lost—it was

so large, and vast, and grand There was a chandelier all of bronze, hung down from the middle of the ceiling, and I had never seen one before, and looked at it all in amaze Then, at one end of the hall, was a great fire place, as large as the sides of the houses in my country, with massy andirons and dogs to hold the wood, and by it were heavy old fashioned sofas At the opposite end of the hall, to the left as you went in—on the western side—was an organ built into the wall, and so large that it filled up the best part of that end Beyond it, on the same side, was a door, and opposite, on each side of the fire place, were also doors leading to the east front, but those I never went through as long as I stayed in the house, so I can't tell you what lay beyond

The afternoon was closing in, and the hall, which had no fire lighted in it, looked dark and gloomy, but we did not stay there a moment The old servant, who had opened the door for us, bowed to Mr Henry, and took us in through the door at the further side of the great organ, and led us through several smaller halls and passages into the west drawing room, where he said that Miss Furnivall was sitting Poor little Miss Rosamond held very tight to me, as if she were scared and lost in that great place, and as for myself, I was not much better The west drawing room was very cheerful looking, with a warm fire in it, and plenty of good, comfortable furniture about Miss Furnivall was an old lady not far from eighty, I should think, but I do not know She was thin and tall, and had a face as full of fine wrinkles as if they had been drawn all over it with a needle's point Her eyes were very watchful, to make up, I suppose, for her being so deaf as to be obliged to use a trumpet Sitting with her, working at the same great piece of tapestry, was Mrs Stark, her maid and companion, and almost as old as she was She had lived with Miss Furnivall ever since they both were young, and now she seemed more like a friend than a servant,

she looked so cold and grey, and stony, as if she had never loved or cared for any one, and I don't suppose she did care for any one, except her mistress, and, owing to the great deafness of the latter, Mrs Stark treated her very much as if she were a child. Mr Henry gave some message from my lord, and then he bowed good bye to us all—taking no notice of my sweet little Miss Rosamond's outstretched hand—and left us standing there, being looked at by the two old ladies through their spectacles.

I was right glad when they rung for the old footman who had shown us in at first, and told him to take us to our rooms. So we went out of that great drawing-room, and into another sitting room, and out of that, and then up a great flight of stairs, and along a broad gallery—which was something like a library, having books all down one side, and windows and writing-tables all down the other—till we came to our rooms, which I was not sorry to hear were just over the kitchens, for I began to think I should be lost in that wilderness of a house. There was an old nursery, that had been used for all the little lords and ladies long ago, with a pleasant fire burning in the grate, and the kettle boiling on the hob, and tea things spread out on the table, and out of that room was the night nursery, with a little crib for Miss Rosamond close to my bed. And old James called up Dorothy, his wife, to bid us welcome, and both he and she were so hospitable and kind, that by and by Miss Rosamond and me felt quite at home, and by the time tea was over, she was sitting on Dorothy's knee, and chattering away as fast as her little tongue could go. I soon found out that Dorothy was from Westmorland, and that bound her and me together, as it were, and I would never wish to meet with kinder people than were old James and his wife. James had lived pretty nearly all his life in my lord's family, and thought there was no one so grand as they. He even looked down a little on his wife, because, till



he had married her, she had never lived in any but a farmer's household. But he was very fond of her, as well he might be. They had one servant under them, to do all the rough work. Agnes they called her, and she and me, and James and Dorothy, with Miss Furnivall and Mrs Stark, made up the family, always remembering my sweet little Miss Rosamond! I used to wonder what they had done before she came, they thought so much of her now. Kitchen and drawing room, it was all the same. The hard, sad Miss Furnivall, and the cold Mrs Stark, looked pleased when she came fluttering in like a bird, playing and pranking hither and thither, with a continual murmur, and pretty prattle of gladness. I am sure, they were sorry many a time when she fitted away into the kitchen, though they were too proud to ask her to stay with them, and were a little surprised at her taste, though to be sure, as Mrs Stark said, it was not to be wondered at, remembering what stock her father had come of. The great, old rambling house was a famous place for little Miss Rosamond. She made expeditions all over it, with me at her heels, all, except the east wing, which was never opened, and whither we never thought of going. But in the western and northern part was many a pleasant room, full of things that were curiosities to us, though they might not have been to people who had seen more. The windows were darkened by the sweeping boughs of the trees, and the ivy which had overgrown them. but, in the green gloom, we could manage to see old China jars and carved ivory boxes, and great heavy books, and, above all, the old pictures!

Once, I remember, my darling would have Dorothy go with us to tell us who they all were, for they were all portraits of some of my lord's family, though Dorothy could not tell us the names of every one. We had gone through most of the rooms, when we came to the old state drawing-room over the hall, and there was a picture of Miss Furnivall, or, as she was called in

those days, Miss Grace, for she was the younger sister. Such a beauty she must have been ! but with such a set, proud look, and such scorn looking out of her handsome eyes, with her eyebrows just a little raised, as if she wondered how any one could have the impertinence to look at her, and her lip curled at us, as we stood there gazing. She had a dress on, the like of which I had never seen before, but it was all the fashion when she was young. a hat of some soft white stuff like beaver, pulled a little over her brows, and a beautiful plume of feathers sweeping round it on one side, and her gown of blue satin was open in front to a quilted white stomacher.

'Well, to be sure !' said I, when I had gazed my fill. 'Flesh is grass, they do say, but who would have thought that Miss Furnivall had been such an out-and-out beauty, to see her now ?'

'Yes,' said Dorothy. 'Folks change sadly. But if what my master's father used to say was true, Miss Furnivall, the elder sister, was handsomer than Miss Grace. Her picture is here somewhere, but, if I show it you, you must never let on, even to James, that you have seen it. Can the little lady hold her tongue, think you ?' asked she.

I was not so sure, for she was such a little sweet, bold, open spoken child, so I set her to hide herself, and then I helped Dorothy to turn a great picture, that leaned with its face towards the wall, and was not hung up as the others were. To be sure, it beat Miss Grace for beauty, and, I think, for scornful pride, too, though in that matter it might be hard to choose. I could have looked at it an hour, but Dorothy seemed half frightened at having shown it to me, and hurried it back again, and bade me run and find Miss Rosamond for that there were some ugly places about the house, where she should like ill for the child to go. I was a brave, high spirited girl, and thought little of what the old woman said, for I liked hide and seek as well as any child in the parish, so off I ran to find my little one.

As winter drew on, and the days grew shorter, I was sometimes almost certain that I heard a noise as if some one was playing on the great organ in the hall. I did not hear it every evening, but, certainly, I did very often, usually when I was sitting with Miss Rosamond, after I had put her to bed, and keeping quite still and silent in the bedroom. Then I used to hear it booming and swelling away in the distance. The first night, when I went down to my supper, I asked Dorothy who had been playing music, and James said very shortly that I was a gowk to take the wind soughing among the trees for music. But I saw Dorothy look at him very fearfully, and Bessy, the kitchen maid, said something beneath her breath, and went quite white. I saw they did not like my question, so I held my peace till I was with Dorothy alone, when I knew I could get a good deal out of her. So, the next day, I watched my time, and I coaxed and asked her who it was that played the organ, for I knew that it was the organ and not the wind well enough, for all I had kept silence before James. But Dorothy had had her lesson, I'll warrant, and never a word could I get from her. So then I tried Bessy, though I had always held my head rather above her, as I was evened to James and Dorothy, and she was little better than their servant. So she said I must never, never tell, and if I ever told, I was never to say *she* had told me, but it was a very strange noise, and she had heard it many a time, but most of all on winter nights, and before storms, and folks did say, it was the old lord playing on the great organ in the hall, just as he used to do when he was alive, but who the old lord was, or why he played, and why he played on stormy winter evenings in particular, she either could not or would not tell me. Well! I told you I had a brave heart, and I thought it was rather pleasant to have that grand music rolling about the house, let who would be the player, for now it rose above the great gusts of wind, and wailed and triumphed just like a living

creature, and then it fell to a softness most complete, only it was always music, and tunes, so it was nonsense to call it the wind. I thought at first that it might be Miss Furnivall who played, unknown to Bessy, but, one day when I was in the hall by myself, I opened the organ and peeped all about it and around it, as I had done to the organ in Crosthwaite Church once before, and I saw it was all broken and destroyed inside, though it looked so brave and fine, and then, though it was noonday, my flesh began to creep a little, and I shut it up, and run away pretty quickly to my own bright nursery, and I did not like hearing the music for some time after that, any more than James and Dorothy did. All this time Miss Rosamond was making herself more and more beloved. The old ladies liked her to dine with them at their early dinner, James stood behind Miss Furnivall's chair, and I behind Miss Rosamond's all in state, and, after dinner, she would play about in a corner of the great drawing-room, as still as any mouse, while Miss Furnivall slept, and I had my dinner in the kitchen. But she was glad enough to come to me in the nursery afterwards, for, as she said, Miss Furnivall was so sad, and Mrs Stark so dull, but she and I were merry enough, and, by and by, I got not to care for that weird rolling music, which did one no harm, if we did not know where it came from.

That winter was very cold. In the middle of October the frosts began, and lasted many, many weeks. I remember, one day at dinner, Miss Furnivall lifted up her sad, heavy eyes, and said to Mrs Stark, 'I am afraid we shall have a terrible winter,' in a strange kind of meaning way. But Mrs Stark pretended not to hear, and talked very loud of something else. My little lady and I did not care for the frost, not we! As long as it was dry we climbed up the steep brows, behind the house, and went up on the Fells, which were bleak, and bare enough, and there we ran races in the fresh, sharp

air, and once we came down by a new path that took us past the two old gnarled holly trees, which grew about half way down by the east side of the house. But the days grew shorter and shorter, and the old lord, if it was he, played away more and more stormily and sadly on the great organ. One Sunday afternoon—it must have been towards the end of November—I asked Dorothy to take charge of little Missey when she came out of the drawing room, after Miss Furnivall had had her nap, for it was too cold to take her with me to church, and yet I wanted to go. And Dorothy was glad enough to promise, and was so fond of the child that all seemed well, and Bessy and I set off very briskly, though the sky hung heavy and black over the white earth, as if the night had never fully gone away, and the air, though still, was very biting and keen.

‘We shall have a fall of snow,’ said Bessy to me. And sure enough, even while we were in church, it came down thick, in great large flakes, so thick it almost darkened the windows. It had stopped snowing before we came out, but it lay soft, thick, and deep beneath our feet, as we tramped home. Before we got to the hall the moon rose, and I think it was lighter then—what with the moon, and what with the white dazzling snow—than it had been when we went to church, between two and three o’clock. I have not told you that Miss Furnivall and Mrs Stark never went to church: they used to read the prayers together, in their quiet gloomy way, they seemed to feel the Sunday very long without their tapestry work to be busy at. So when I went to Dorothy in the kitchen, to fetch Miss Rosamond and take her upstairs with me, I did not much wonder when the old woman told me that the ladies had kept the child with them, and that she had never come to the kitchen, as I had bidden her, when she was tired of behaving pretty in the drawing-room. So I took off my things and went to find her, and bring her to her supper in the nursery. But when I went into

the best drawing room, there sat the two old ladies, very still and quiet, dropping out a word now and then, but looking as if nothing so bright and merry as Miss Rosamond had ever been near them. Still I thought she might be hiding from me, it was one of her pretty ways, and that she had persuaded them to look as if they knew nothing about her, so I went softly peeping under this sofa, and behind that chair, making believe I was sadly frightened at not finding her.

'What's the matter, Hester?' said Mrs Stark, sharply. I don't know if Miss Furnivall had seen me, for, as I told you, she was very deaf, and she sat quite still, idly staring into the fire, with her hopeless face. 'I'm only looking for my little Rosy Posy,' replied I, still thinking that the child was there, and near me, though I could not see her.

'Miss Rosamond is not here,' said Mrs Stark. 'She went away more than an hour ago to find Dorothy.' And she too turned and went on looking into the fire.

My heart sank at this, and I began to wish I had never left my darling. I went back to Dorothy and told her. James was gone out for the day, but she and me and Bessy took lights and went up into the nursery first, and then we roamed over the great large house, calling and entreating Miss Rosamond to come out of her hiding place, and not frighten us to death in that way. But there was no answer, no sound.

'Oh!' said I at last, 'Can she have got into the east wing and hidden there?'

But Dorothy said it was not possible, for that she herself had never been in there, that the doors were always locked, and my lord's steward had the keys, she believed, at any rate, neither she nor James had ever seen them. So I said I would go back, and see if, after all, she was not hidden in the drawing room, unknown to the old ladies, and if I found her there, I said, I would whip her well for the fright she had given me, but I never meant to do it. Well, I went back to the

west drawing room, and I told Mrs Stark we could not find her anywhere, and asked for leave to look all about the furniture there, for I thought now, that she might have fallen asleep in some warm hidden corner, but no! we looked, Miss Furnivall got up and looked, trembling all over, and she was nowhere there, then we set off again, every one in the house, and looked in all the places we had searched before, but we could not find her. Miss Furnivall shivered and shook so much, that Mrs Stark took her back into the warm drawing-room, but not before they had made me promise to bring her to them when she was found. Well a day! I began to think she never would be found, when I bethought me to look out into the great front court, all covered with snow. I was upstairs when I looked out, but, it was such clear moonlight, I could see, quite plain, two little footprints, which might be traced from the hall door, and round the corner of the east wing. I don't know how I got down, but I tugged open the great, stiff hall door, and, throwing the skirt of my gown over my head for a cloak, I ran out. I turned the east corner, and there a black shadow fell on the snow, but when I came again into the moonlight, there were the little footmarks going up—up to the Fells. It was bitter cold, so cold that the air almost took the skin off my face as I ran, but I ran on, crying to think how my poor little darling must be perished, and frightened. I was within sight of the holly trees when I saw a shepherd coming down the hill, bearing something in his arms wrapped in his maud. He shouted to me, and asked me if I had lost a bairn, and, when I could not speak for crying, he bore towards me, and I saw my wee bairn lying still, and white, and stiff, in his arms, as if she had been dead. He told me he had been up the Fells to gather in his sheep, before the deep cold of night came on, and that under the holly trees (black marks on the hill side, where no other bush was for miles around) he had found my little lady—my lamb—my

queen—my darling—stiff and cold, in the terrible sleep which is frost begotten Oh! the joy, and the tears of having her in my arms once again! for I would not let him carry her, but took her, maud and all, into my own arms, and held her near my own warm neck and heart, and felt the life stealing slowly back again into her little gentle limbs But she was still insensible when we reached the hall, and I had no breath for speech We went in by the kitchen door

‘Bring the warming-pan,’ said I, and I carried her upstairs and began undressing her by the nursery fire, which Bessy had kept up I called my little lammie all the sweet and playful names I could think of—even while my eyes were blinded by my tears, and at last, oh! at length she opened her large blue eyes Then I put her into her warm bed, and sent Dorothy down to tell Miss Furnivall that all was well, and I made up my mind to sit by my darling’s bedside the live long night She fell away into a soft sleep as soon as her pretty head had touched the pillow, and I watched by her till morning light, when she wakened up bright and clear—or so I thought at first—and, my dears, so I think now

She said that she had fancied that she should like to go to Dorothy, for that both the old ladies were asleep, and it was very dull in the drawing room, and that, as she was going through the west lobby, she saw the snow through the high window falling—falling—soft and steady, but she wanted to see it lying pretty and white on the ground, so she made her way into the great hall, and then, going to the window, she saw it bright and soft upon the drive, but while she stood there, she saw a little girl, not so old as she was, ‘but so pretty,’ said my darling, ‘and this little girl beckoned to me to come out, and oh, she was so pretty and so sweet, I could not choose but go’ And then this other little girl had taken her by the hand, and side by side the two had gone round the east corner



'Now, you are a naughty little girl, and telling stories,' said I 'What would your good mamma, that is in heaven, and never told a story in her life, say to her little Rosamond, if she heard her—and I dare say she does—telling stories!'

'Indeed, Hester,' sobbed out my child, 'I'm telling you true Indeed I am'

'Don't tell me!' said I, very stern 'I tracked you by your footmarks through the snow, there were only yours to be seen and if you had had a little girl to go hand in hand with you up the hill, don't you think the footprints would have gone along with yours?'

'I can't help it, dear, dear Hester,' said she, crying, 'if they did not, I never looked at her feet, but she held my hand fast and tight in her little one, and it was very, very cold She took me up the Fell path, up to the holly trees, and there I saw a lady weeping and crying, but when she saw me, she hushed her weeping, and smiled very proud and grand, and took me on her knee, and began to lull me to sleep, and that's all, Hester—but that is true, and my dear mamma knows it is,' said she, crying So I thought the child was in a fever, and pretended to believe her, as she went over her story—over and over again, and always the same At last Dorothy knocked at the door with Miss Rosamond's breakfast, and she told me the old ladies were down in the eating parlour, and that they wanted to speak to me They had both been into the night-nursery the evening before, but it was after Miss Rosamond was asleep, so they had only looked at her—not asked me any questions

'I shall catch it,' thought I to myself, as I went along the north gallery 'And yet,' I thought, taking courage, 'it was in their charge I left her, and it's they that's to blame for letting her steal away unknown and unwatched' So I went in boldly, and told my story. I told it all to Miss Furnivall, shouting it close to her ear, but when I came to the mention of the other little

girl out in the snow, coaxing and tempting her out and wiling her up to the grand and beautiful lady by the holly tree, she threw her arms up—her old and withered arms—and cried aloud, 'Oh! Heaven, forgive! Have mercy!'

Mrs Stark took hold of her, roughly enough, I thought, but she was past Mrs Stark's management, and spoke to me, in a kind of wild warning and authority

'Hester! keep her from that child! It will lure her to her death! That evil child! Tell her it is a wicked, naughty child' Then Mrs Stark hurried me out of the room, where, indeed, I was glad enough to go, but Miss Furnivall kept shrieking out, 'Oh! have mercy! Wilt Thou never forgive! It is many a long year ago'—

I was very uneasy in my mind after that I durst never leave Miss Rosamond, night or day, for fear lest she might slip off again, after some fancy or other, and all the more, because I thought I could make out that Miss Furnivall was crazy, from their odd ways about her, and I was afraid lest something of the same kind (which might be in the family, you know) hung over my darling And the great frost never ceased all this time, and, whenever it was a more stormy night than usual, between the gusts, and through the wind, we heard the old lord playing on the great organ But, old lord, or not, wherever Miss Rosamond went, there I followed, for my love for her, pretty helpless orphan, was stronger than my fear for the grand and terrible sound Besides, it rested with me to keep her cheerful and merry, as beseemed her age So we played together, and wandered together, here and there, and everywhere, for I never dared to lose sight of her again in that large and rambling house And so it happened, that one afternoon, not long before Christmas Day, we were playing together on the billiard table in the great hall (not that we knew the right way of playing, but she liked to roll the smooth ivory balls with her pretty

hands, and I liked to do whatever she did), and, by-and by, without our noticing it, it grew dusk indoors, though it was still light in the open air, and I was thinking of taking her back into the nursery, when, all of a sudden, she cried out

'Look, Hester! look! there is my poor little girl out in the snow!'

I turned towards the long narrow windows, and there, sure enough, I saw a little girl, less than my Miss Rosamond—dressed all unfit to be out of doors such a bitter night—crying, and beating against the window-panes, as if she wanted to be let in. She seemed to sob and wail, till Miss Rosamond could bear it no longer, and was flying to the door to open it, when, all of a sudden, and close upon us, the great organ pealed out so loud and thundering, it fairly made me tremble, and all the more, when I remembered me that, even in the stillness of that dead cold weather, I had heard no sound of little battering hands upon the window glass, although the Phantom Child had seemed to put forth all its force, and, although I had seen it wail and cry, no faintest touch of sound had fallen upon my ears. Whether I remembered all this at the very moment, I do not know, the great organ sound had so stunned me into terror, but this I know, I caught up Miss Rosamond before she got the hall door opened, and clutched her, and carried her away, kicking and screaming, into the large bright kitchen, where Dorothy and Agnes were busy with their mince pies.

'What is the matter with my sweet one?' cried Dorothy, as I bore in Miss Rosamond, who was sobbing as if her heart would break.

'She won't let me open the door for my little girl to come in, and she'll die if she is out on the Fells all night. Cruel, naughty Hester,' she said, slapping me, but she might have struck harder, for I had seen a look of ghastly terror on Dorothy's face, which made my very blood run cold.

'Shut the back kitchen door fast, and bolt it well,' said she to Agnes. She said no more, she gave me raisins and almonds to quiet Miss Rosamond, but she sobbed about the little girl in the snow, and would not touch any of the good things. I was thankful when she cried herself to sleep in bed. Then I stole down to the kitchen, and told Dorothy I had made up my mind. I would carry my darling back to my father's house in Applethwaite, where, if we lived humbly, we lived at peace. I said I had been frightened enough with the old lord's organ playing, but now, that I had seen for myself this little moaning child, all decked out as no child in the neighbourhood could be, beating and battering to get in, yet always without any sound or noise—with the dark wound on its right shoulder, and that Miss Rosamond had known it again for the phantom that had nearly lured her to her death (which Dorothy knew was true), I would stand it no longer.

I saw Dorothy change colour once or twice. When I had done, she told me she did not think I could take Miss Rosamond with me, for that she was my lord's ward, and I had no right over her, and she asked me, would I leave the child that I was so fond of, just for sounds and sights that could do me no harm, and that they had all had to get used to in their turns? I was all in a hot, trembling passion, and I said it was very well for her to talk, that knew what these sights and noises betokened, and that had, perhaps, had something to do with the Spectre Child while it was alive. And I taunted her so, that she told me all she knew, at last, and then I wished I had never been told, for it only made me more afraid than ever.

She said she had heard the tale from old neighbours, that were alive when she was first married, when folks used to come to the hall sometimes, before it had got such a bad name on the country side, it might not be true, or it might, what she had been told.

The old lord was Miss Furnivall's father—Miss Grace,

as Dorothy called her, for Miss Maude was the elder, and Miss Furnivall by rights. The old lord was eaten up with pride. Such a proud man was never seen or heard of, and his daughters were like him. No one was good enough to wed them, although they had choice enough, for they were the great beauties of their day, as I had seen by their portraits, where they hung in the state drawing room. But, as the old saying is, 'Pride will have a fall', and these two haughty beauties fell in love with the same man, and he no better than a foreign musician, whom their father had down from London to play music with him at the Manor House. For, above all things, next to his pride, the old lord loved music. He could play on nearly every instrument that ever was heard of, and it was a strange thing it did not soften him, but he was a fierce dour old man, and had broken his poor wife's heart with his cruelty, they said. He was mad after music, and would pay any money for it. So he got this foreigner to come, who made such beautiful music, that they said the very birds on the trees stopped their singing to listen. And, by degrees, this foreign gentleman got such a hold over the old lord, that nothing would serve him but that he must come every year, and it was he that had the great organ brought from Holland, and built up in the hall, where it stood now. He taught the old lord to play on it, but many and many a time, when Lord Furnivall was thinking of nothing but his fine organ, and his finer music, the dark foreigner was walking abroad in the woods with one of the young ladies, now Miss Maude, and then Miss Grace.

Miss Maude won the day and carried off the prize, such as it was, and he and she were married, all unknown to any one, and before he made his next yearly visit, she had been confined of a little girl at a farm house on the Moors, while her father and Miss Grace thought she was away at Doncaster Races. But though she was a wife and a mother, she was not a bit softened,

but as haughty and as passionate as ever, and perhaps more so, for she was jealous of Miss Grace, to whom her foreign husband paid a deal of court—by way of blinding her—as he told his wife. But Miss Grace triumphed over Miss Maude, and Miss Maude grew fiercer and fiercer, both with her husband and with her sister, and the former—who could easily shake off what was disagreeable, and hide himself in foreign countries—went away a month before his usual time that summer, and half threatened that he would never come back again. Meanwhile, the little girl was left at the farm house, and her mother used to have her horse saddled and gallop wildly over the hills to see her once every week, at the very least—for where she loved, she loved, and where she hated, she hated. And the old lord went on playing—playing on his organ, and the servants thought the sweet music he made had soothed down his awful temper, of which (Dorothy said) some terrible tales could be told. He grew infirm too, and had to walk with a crutch, and his son—that was the present Lord Furnivall's father—was with the army in America, and the other son at sea, so Miss Maude had it pretty much her own way, and she and Miss Grace grew colder and bitterer to each other every day, till at last they hardly ever spoke, except when the old lord was by. The foreign musician came again the next summer, but it was for the last time, for they led him such a life with their jealousy and their passions, that he grew weary, and went away, and never was heard of again. And Miss Maude, who had always meant to have her marriage acknowledged when her father should be dead, was left now a deserted wife—whom nobody knew to have been married—with a child that she dared not own, although she loved it to distraction, living with a father whom she feared, and a sister whom she hated. When the next summer passed over and the dark foreigner never came, both Miss Maude and Miss Grace grew gloomy and sad, they had a haggard look about

them, though they looked handsome as ever. But by-and by Miss Maude brightened, for her father grew more and more infirm, and more than ever carried away by his music, and she and Miss Grace lived almost entirely apart, having separate rooms, the one on the west side, Miss Maude on the east—those very rooms which were now shut up. So she thought she might have her little girl with her, and no one need ever know except those who dared not speak about it, and were bound to believe that it was, as she said, a cottager's child she had taken a fancy to. All this, Dorothy said, was pretty well known, but what came afterwards no one knew, except Miss Grace, and Mrs Stark, who was even then her maid, and much more of a friend to her than ever her sister had been. But the servants supposed, from words that were dropped, that Miss Maude had triumphed over Miss Grace, and told her that all the time the dark foreigner had been mocking her with pretended love—he was her own husband, the colour left Miss Grace's cheek and lips that very day for ever, and she was heard to say many a time that sooner or later she would have her revenge, and Mrs Stark was for ever spying about the east rooms.

One fearful night, just after the New Year had come in, when the snow was lying thick and deep, and the flakes were still falling—fast enough to blind any one who might be out and abroad—there was a great and violent noise heard, and the old lord's voice above all, cursing and swearing awfully—and the cries of a little child—and the proud defiance of a fierce woman—and the sound of a blow—and a dead stillness—and moans and wailings dying away on the hill side. Then the old lord summoned all his servants, and told them, with terrible oaths, and words more terrible, that his daughter had disgraced herself, and that he had turned her out of doors—her, and her child—and that if ever they gave her help—or food—or shelter—he prayed that they might never enter Heaven. And, all the

while, Miss Grace stood by him, white and still as any stone, and when he had ended she heaved a great sigh, as much as to say her work was done, and her end was accomplished. But the old lord never touched his organ again, and died within the year, and no wonder! for, on the morrow of that wild and fearful night, the shepherds, coming down the Fell side, found Miss Maude sitting, all crazy and smiling, under the holly trees, nursing a dead child—with a terrible mark on its right shoulder. 'But that was not what killed it,' said Dorothy, 'it was the frost and the cold,—every wild creature was in its hole, and every beast in its fold—while the child and its mother were turned out to wander on the Fells! And now you know all! and I wonder if you are less frightened now?'

I was more frightened than ever, but I said I was not. I wished Miss Rosamond and myself well out of that dreadful house for ever, but I would not leave her, and I dared not take her away. But oh! how I watched her, and guarded her! We bolted the doors, and shut the window shutters fast, an hour or more before dark, rather than leave them open five minutes too late. But my little lady still heard the weird child crying and mourning, and not all we could do or say could keep her from wanting to go to her, and let her in from the cruel wind and the snow. All this time, I kept away from Miss Furnivall and Mrs Stark, as much as ever I could, for I feared them—I knew no good could be about them, with their grey hard faces, and their dreamy eyes, looking back into the ghastly years that were gone. But, even in my fear, I had a kind of pity—for Miss Furnivall, at least. Those gone down to the pit can hardly have a more hopeless look than that which was ever on her face. At last I even got so sorry for her—who never said a word but what was quite forced from her—that I prayed for her, and I taught Miss Rosamond to pray for one who had done a deadly sin, but often when she came to those words,



she would listen, and start up from her knees, and say, 'I hear my little girl plaining and crying very sad—Oh! let her in, or she will die!'

One night—just after New Year's Day had come at last, and the long winter had taken a turn, as I hoped—I heard the west drawing room bell ring three times, which was the signal for me. I would not leave Miss Rosamond alone, for all she was asleep—for the old lord had been playing wilder than ever—and I feared lest my darling should waken to hear the spectre child, see her I knew she could not. I had fastened the windows too well for that. So I took her out of her bed and wrapped her up in such outer clothes as were most handy, and carried her down to the drawing room, where the old ladies sat at their tapestry work as usual. They looked up when I came in, and Mrs Stark asked, quite astounded, 'Why did I bring Miss Rosamond there, out of her warm bed?' I had begun to whisper, 'Because I was afraid of her being tempted out while I was away, by the wild child in the snow,' when she stopped me short (with a glance at Miss Furnivall), and said Miss Furnivall wanted me to undo some work she had done wrong, and which neither of them could see to unpick. So I laid my pretty dear on the sofa, and sat down on a stool by them, and hardened my heart against them, as I heard the wind rising and howling.

Miss Rosamond slept on sound, for all the wind blew so, and Miss Furnivall said never a word, nor looked round when the gusts shook the windows. All at once she started up to her full height, and put up one hand, as if to bid us listen.

'I hear voices!' said she. 'I hear terrible screams—I hear my father's voice!'

Just at that moment my darling wakened with a sudden start. 'My little girl is crying, oh, how she is crying!' and she tried to get up and go to her, but she got her feet entangled in the blanket, and I caught her up, for my flesh had begun to creep at these noises,

which they heard while we could catch no sound. In a minute or two the noises came, and gathered fast, and filled our ears, we, too, heard voices and screams, and no longer heard the winter's wind that raged abroad. Mrs Stark looked at me, and I at her, but we dared not speak. Suddenly Miss Furnivall went towards the door, out into the ante room, through the west lobby, and opened the door into the great hall. Mrs Stark followed, and I durst not be left, though my heart almost stopped beating for fear. I wrapped my darling tight in my arms, and went out with them. In the hall the screams were louder than ever, they sounded to come from the east wing—nearer and nearer—close on the other side of the locked up doors—close behind them. Then I noticed that the great bronze chandelier seemed all alight, though the hall was dim, and that a fire was blazing in the vast hearth place, though it gave no heat, and I shuddered up with terror, and folded my darling closer to me. But as I did so, the east door shook, and she, suddenly struggling to get free from me, cried, 'Hester! I must go! My little girl is there, I hear her, she is coming! Hester, I must go!'

I held her tight with all my strength, with a set will, I held her. If I had died, my hands would have grasped her still, I was so resolved in my mind. Miss Furnivall stood listening, and paid no regard to my darling, who had got down to the ground, and whom I, upon my knees now, was holding with both my arms clasped round her neck, she still striving and crying to get free.

All at once the east door gave way with a thundering crash, as if torn open in a violent passion, and there came into that broad and mysterious light, the figure of a tall old man, with grey hair and gleaming eyes. He drove before him, with many a relentless gesture of abhorrence, a stern and beautiful woman, with a little child clinging to her dress.

'O Hester! Hester!' cried Miss Rosamond. 'It's

the lady ' the lady below the holly trees , and my little girl is with her Hester ' Hester ' let me go to her , they are drawing me to them I feel them—I feel them I must go '

Again she was almost convulsed by her efforts to get away , but I held her tighter and tighter, till I feared I should do her a hurt , but rather that than let her go towards those terrible phantoms They passed along towards the great hall door, where the winds howled and ravened for their prey , but before they reached that, the lady turned , and I could see that she defied the old man with a fierce and proud defiance , but then she quailed—and then she threw up her arms wildly and piteously to save her child—her little child—from a blow from his uplifted crutch

And Miss Rosamond was torn as by a power stronger than mine, and writhed in my arms, and sobbed (for by this time the poor darling was growing faint)

' They want me to go with them on to the Fells—they are drawing me to them Oh, my little girl ' I would come, but cruel, wicked Hester holds me very tight ' But when she saw the uplifted crutch she swooned away, and I thanked God for it Just at this moment—when the tall old man, his hair streaming as in the blast of a furnace, was going to strike the little shrinking child—Miss Furnivall, the old woman by my side, cried out, ' Oh, father ' father ' spare the little innocent child ' ' But just then I saw—we all saw—another phantom shape itself, and grow clear out of the blue and misty light that filled the hall , we had not seen her till now, for it was another lady who stood by the old man, with a look of relentless hate and triumphant scorn That figure was very beautiful to look upon, with a soft white hat drawn down over the proud brows, and a red and curling lip It was dressed in an open robe of blue satin I had seen that figure before It was the likeness of Miss Furnivall in her youth , and the terrible phantoms moved on, regardless of old Miss

Furnivall's wild entreaty—and the uplifted crutch fell on the right shoulder of the little child, and the younger sister looked on, stony and deadly serene. But at that moment, the dim lights, and the fire that gave no heat, went out of themselves, and Miss Furnivall lay at our feet stricken down by the palsy—death stricken.

Yes! she was carried to her bed that night never to rise again. She lay with her face to the wall, muttering low but muttering alway 'Alas! alas! what is done in youth can never be undone in age! What is done in youth can never be undone in age!'

# CHARLES DICKENS

1812-1870

## THE BAGMAN'S STORY

[From *The Pickwick Papers* 1837]

ONE winter's evening, about five o'clock, just as it began to grow dusk, a man in a gig might have been seen urging his tired horse along the road which leads across Marlborough Downs, in the direction of Bristol. I say he might have been seen, and I have no doubt he would have been, if anybody but a blind man had happened to pass that way, but the weather was so bad, and the night so cold and wet, that nothing was out but the water, and so the traveller jogged along in the middle of the road, lonesome and dreary enough. If any bagman of that day could have caught sight of the little neck or nothing sort of gig, with a clay-coloured body and red wheels, and the vixenish ill-tempered, fast going bay mare, that looked like a cross between a butcher's horse and a two-penny post office pony, he would have known at once, that this traveller could have been no other than Tom Smart, of the great house of Bilson and Slum, Cateaton Street, City. However, as there was no bagman to look on, nobody knew anything at all about the matter, and so Tom Smart and his clay coloured gig with the red wheels, and the vixenish mare with the fast pace, went on together, keeping the secret among them and nobody was a bit the wiser.

There are many pleasanter places even in this dreary world, than Marlborough Downs when it blows hard, and if you throw in beside, a gloomy winter's evening, a miry and sloppy road, and a pelting fall of heavy rain, and try the effect, by way of experiment, in your own

proper person, you will experience the full force of this observation

The wind blew—not up the road or down it, though that 's bad enough, but sheer across it, sending the rain slanting down like the lines they used to rule in the copy books at school, to make the boys slope well For a moment it would die away, and the traveller would begin to delude himself into the belief that, exhausted with its previous fury, it had quietly lain itself down to rest, when, whoo ! he would hear it growling and whistling in the distance, and on it would come rushing over the hill tops, and sweeping along the plain, gathering sound and strength as it drew nearer, until it dashed with a heavy gust against horse and man, driving the sharp rain into their ears, and its cold damp breath into their very bones, and past them it would scour, far, far away, with a stunning roar, as if in ridicule of their weakness, and triumphant in the consciousness of its own strength and power

The bay mare splashed away, through the mud and water, with drooping ears, now and then tossing her head as if to express her disgust at this very ungentlemanly behaviour of the elements, but keeping a good pace notwithstanding, until a gust of wind, more furious than any that had yet assailed them, caused her to stop suddenly and plant her four feet firmly against the ground, to prevent her being blown over It's a special mercy that she did this, for if she *had* been blown over, the vixenish mare was so light, and the gig was so light, and Tom Smart such a light weight into the bargain, that they must infallibly have all gone rolling over and over together, until they reached the confines of earth, or until the wind fell, and in either case the probability is, that neither the vixenish mare, nor the clay-coloured gig with the red wheels, nor Tom Smart, would ever have been fit for service again

'Well, damn my straps and whiskers,' says Tom Smart (Tom sometimes had an unpleasant knack of

swearing), 'Damn my straps and whiskers,' says Tom, 'if this ain't pleasant, blow me!'

You'll very likely ask me why, as Tom Smart had been pretty well blown already, he expressed this wish to be submitted to the same process again. I can't say—all I know is, that Tom Smart said so—or at least he always told my uncle he said so, and it's just the same thing.

'Blow me,' says Tom Smart, and the mare neighed as if she were precisely of the same opinion.

'Cheer up, old girl,' said Tom, patting the bay mare on the neck with the end of his whip. 'It won't do pushing on, such a night as this, the first house we come to we'll put up at, so the faster you go the sooner it's over. Soho, old girl—gently—gently.'

Whether the vixenish mare was sufficiently well acquainted with the tones of Tom's voice to comprehend his meaning, or whether she found it colder standing still than moving on, of course I can't say. But I can say that Tom had no sooner finished speaking, than she pricked up her ears, and started forward at a speed which made the clay coloured gig rattle till you would have supposed every one of the red spokes were going to fly out on the turf of Marlborough Downs, and even Tom, whip as he was, couldn't stop or check her pace, until she drew up, of her own accord, before a road-side inn on the right hand side of the way, about half a quarter of a mile from the end of the Downs.

Tom cast a hasty glance at the upper part of the house as he threw the reins to the hostler, and stuck the whip in the box. It was a strange old place, built of a kind of shingle, inlaid, as it were, with cross beams, with gabled topped windows projecting completely over the pathway, and a low door with a dark porch, and a couple of steep steps leading down into the house, instead of the modern fashion of half a dozen shallow ones leading up to it. It was a comfortable looking place though, for there was a strong cheerful light in the

bar window, which shed a bright ray across the road, and even lighted up the hedge on the other side, and there was a red flickering light in the opposite window, one moment but faintly discernible, and the next gleaming strongly through the drawn curtains, which intimated that a rousing fire was blazing within. Marking these little evidences with the eye of an experienced traveller, Tom dismounted with as much agility as his half frozen limbs would permit, and entered the house.

In less than five minutes' time, Tom was esconced in the room opposite the bar—the very room where he had imagined the fire blazing—before a substantial matter-of fact roaring fire, composed of something short of a bushel of coals, and wood enough to make half a dozen decent gooseberry bushes, piled half way up the chimney, and roaring and crackling with a sound that of itself would have warmed the heart of any reasonable man. This was comfortable, but this was not all, for a smartly dressed girl, with a bright eye and a neat ankle, was laying a very clean white cloth on the table, and as Tom sat with his slippered feet on the fender, and his back to the open door, he saw a charming prospect of the bar reflected in the glass over the chimney piece, with delightful rows of green bottles and gold labels, together with jars of pickles and preserves, and cheeses and boiled hams, and rounds of beef, arranged on shelves in the most tempting and delicious array. Well, this was comfortable too, but even this was not all—for in the bar, seated at tea at the nicest possible little table, drawn close up before the brightest possible little fire, was a buxom widow of somewhere about eight and forty or thereabouts, with a face as comfortable as the bar, who was evidently the landlady of the house, and the supreme ruler over all these agreeable possessions. There was only one drawback to the beauty of the whole picture, and that was a tall man—a very tall man—in a brown coat and bright basket buttons, and black whiskers, and wavy black hair, who was seated at tea



with the widow, and who it required no great penetration to discover was in a fair way of persuading her to be a widow no longer, but to confer upon him the privilege of sitting down in that bar, for and during the whole remainder of the term of his natural life

Tom Smart was by no means of an irritable or envious disposition, but somehow or other the tall man with the brown coat and the bright basket buttons did rouse what little gall he had in his composition, and did make him feel extremely indignant the more especially as he could now and then observe, from his seat before the glass, certain little affectionate familiarities passing between the tall man and the widow, which sufficiently denoted that the tall man was as high in favour as he was in size. Tom was fond of hot punch—I may venture to say he was *very* fond of hot punch—and after he had seen the vixenish mare well fed and well littered down, and had eaten every bit of the nice little hot dinner which the widow tossed up for him with her own hands, he just ordered a tumbler of it, by way of experiment. Now, if there was one thing in the whole range of domestic art, which the widow could manufacture better than another, it was this identical article, and the first tumbler was adapted to Tom Smart's taste with such peculiar nicety, that he ordered a second with the least possible delay. Hot punch is a pleasant thing, gentlemen—an extremely pleasant thing under any circumstances—but in that snug old parlour, before the roaring fire, with the wind blowing outside till every timber in the old house creaked again, Tom Smart found it perfectly delightful. He ordered another tumbler, and then another—I am not quite certain whether he didn't order another after that—but the more he drank of the hot punch, the more he thought of the tall man.

'Confound his impudence!' said Tom to himself, 'what business has he in that snug bar? Such an ugly villain-too!' said Tom. 'If the widow had any taste, she might surely pick up some better fellow than that'

Here Tom's eye wandered from the glass on the chimney piece, to the glass on the table, and as he felt himself become gradually sentimental, he emptied the fourth tumbler of punch and ordered a fifth

Tom Smart, gentlemen, had always been very much attached to the public line. It had long been his ambition to stand in a bar of his own, in a green coat, knee cords, and tops. He had a great notion of taking the chair at convivial dinners, and he had often thought how well he could preside in a room of his own in the talking way, and what a capital example he could set to his customers in the drinking department. All these things passed rapidly through Tom's mind as he sat drinking the hot punch by the roaring fire, and he felt very justly and properly indignant that the tall man should be in a fair way of keeping such an excellent house, while he, Tom Smart, was as far from it as ever. So, after deliberating over the last two tumblers, whether he hadn't a perfect right to pick a quarrel with the tall man for having contrived to get into the good graces of the buxom widow, Tom Smart at last arrived at the satisfactory conclusion that he was a very ill used and persecuted individual, and had better go to bed.

Up a wide and ancient staircase the smart girl preceded Tom, shading the chamber candle with her hand to protect it from the currents of air which in such a rambling old place might have found plenty of room to disport themselves in, without blowing the candle out, but which did blow it out nevertheless, thus affording Tom's enemies an opportunity of asserting that it was he, and not the wind, who extinguished the candle, and that while he pretended to be blowing it alight again, he was in fact kissing the girl. Be this as it may another light was obtained, and Tom was conducted through a maze of rooms, and a labyrinth of passages, to the apartment which had been prepared for his reception, where the girl bade him good night, and left him alone.

It was a good large room with big closets, and a bed

which might have served for a whole boarding school, to say nothing of a couple of oaken presses that would have held the baggage of a small army, but what struck Tom's fancy most was a strange, grim looking high backed chair, carved in the most fantastic manner, with a flowered damask cushion, and the round knobs at the bottom of the legs carefully tied up in red cloth, as if it had got the gout in its toes. Of any other queer chair, Tom would only have thought it *was* a queer chair, and there would have been an end of the matter, but there was something about this particular chair, and yet he couldn't tell what it was, so odd and so unlike any other piece of furniture he had ever seen, that it seemed to fascinate him. He sat down before the fire, and stared at the old chair for half an hour,—Deuce take the chair, it was such a strange old thing, he couldn't take his eyes off it.

'Well,' said Tom, slowly undressing himself, and staring at the old chair all the while, which stood with a mysterious aspect by the bedside, 'I never saw such a rum concern as that in my days. Very odd,' said Tom, who had got rather sage with the hot punch, 'Very odd.' Tom shook his head with an air of profound wisdom, and looked at the chair again. He couldn't make anything of it though, so he got into bed, covered himself up warm, and fell asleep.

In about half an hour Tom woke up, with a start, from a confused dream of tall men and tumblers of punch, and the first object that presented itself to his waking imagination was the queer chair.

'I won't look at it any more,' said Tom to himself, and he squeezed his eyelids together, and tried to persuade himself he was going to sleep again. No use, nothing but queer chairs danced before his eyes, kicking up their legs, jumping over each other's backs, and playing all kinds of antics.

'I may as well see one real chair, as two or three complete sets of false ones,' said Tom, bringing out his

head from under the bed clothes There it was, plainly discernible by the light of the fire, looking as provoking as ever

Tom gazed at the chair, and, suddenly as he looked at it, a most extraordinary change seemed to come over it The carving of the back gradually assumed the lineaments and expression of an old shrivelled human face, the damask cushion became an antique, flapped waistcoat, the round knobs grew into a couple of feet, encased in red cloth slippers, and the old chair looked like a very ugly old man, of the previous century, with his arms a kimbo Tom sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes to dispel the illusion No The chair was an ugly old gentleman, and what was more, he was winking at Tom Smart

Tom was naturally a headlong, careless sort of dog, and he had had five tumblers of hot punch into the bargain, so, although he was a little startled at first, he began to grow rather indignant when he saw the old gentleman winking and leering at him with such an impudent air At length he resolved that he wouldn't stand it, and as the old face still kept winking away as fast as ever, Tom said, in a very angry tone

'What the devil are you winking at me for?'

'Because I like it, Tom Smart,' said the chair, or the old gentleman, whichever you like to call him He stopped winking though, when Tom spoke, and began grinning like a superannuated monkey

'How do you know my name, old nut cracker face?' inquired Tom Smart, rather staggered, —though he pretended to carry it off so well

'Come, come, Tom,' said the old gentleman, 'that's not the way to address solid Spanish Mahogany Dam'me, you couldn't treat me with less respect if I was venerated' When the old gentleman said this, he looked so fierce that 'knc began to be frightened

'I didn't mean to ~~scare~~ you with any disrespect, sir,'

said Tom, in a much humbler tone than he had spoken in at first

'Well, well,' said the old fellow, 'perhaps not—perhaps not Tom—'

'Sir—'

'I know everything about you, Tom, everything You're very poor, Tom'

'I certainly am,' said Tom Smart 'But how came you to know that?'

'Never mind that,' said the old gentleman, 'you're much too fond of punch, Tom'

Tom Smart was just on the point of protesting that he hadn't tasted a drop since his last birthday, but when his eye encountered that of the old gentleman, he looked so knowing that Tom blushed, and was silent

'Tom,' said the old gentleman, 'the widow's a fine woman—remarkably fine woman—eh, Tom?' Here the old fellow screwed up his eyes, cocked up one of his wasted little legs, and looked altogether so unpleasantly amorous, that Tom was quite disgusted with the levity of his behaviour,—at his time of life, too'

'I am her guardian, Tom,' said the old gentleman

'Are you?' inquired Tom Smart

'I knew her mother, Tom,' said the old fellow, 'and her grandmother She was very fond of me—made me this waistcoat, Tom'

'Did she?' said Tom Smart

'And these shoes,' said the old fellow, lifting up one of the red cloth mufflers, 'but don't mention it, Tom I shouldn't like to have it known that she was so much attached to me It might occasion some unpleasantness in the family' When the old rascal said this, he looked so extremely impertinent, that, as Tom Smart afterwards declared, he could have sat upon him without remorse

'I have been a great favourite among the women in my time, Tom,' said the profligate old debauchee, 'hundreds of fine women have sat in my lap for hours

together 'What do you think of that, you dog, eh' The old gentleman was proceeding to recount some other exploits of his youth, when he was seized with such a violent fit of creaking that he was unable to proceed

'Just serves you right, old boy,' thought Tom Smart, but he didn't say anything

'Ah!' said the old fellow, 'I am a good deal troubled with this now I am getting old, Tom, and have lost nearly all my rails I have had an operation performed, too—a small piece let into my back—and I found it a severe trial, Tom'

'I dare say you did, sir,' said Tom Smart

'However,' said the old gentleman, 'that's not the point Tom' I want you to marry the widow'

'Me, sir' said Tom

'You,' said the old gentleman

'Bless your reverend locks,' said Tom—(he had a few scattered horse hairs left), 'bless your reverend locks, she wouldn't have me' And Tom sighed involuntarily, as he thought of the bar

'Wouldn't she?' said the old gentleman, firmly

'No, no,' said Tom, 'there's somebody else in the wind A tall man—a confoundedly tall man—with black wh skers'

'Tom,' said the old gentleman, 'she will never have him'

'Won't she?' said Tom 'If you stood in the bar, old gentleman, you'd tell another story'

'Pooh, pooh,' said the old gentleman 'I know all about that'

'About what?' said Tom

'The kissing behind the door, and all that sort of thing, Tom,' said the old gentleman And here he gave another impudent look, which made Tom very wroth, because as you all know, gentlemen, to hear an old fellow, who ought to know better, talking about these things, is very unpleasant—nothing more so

'I know all about that, Tom,' said the old gentleman. 'I have seen it done very often in my time, Tom, between more people than I should like to mention to you, but it never came to anything after all'

'You must have seen some queer things,' said Tom, with an inquisitive look

'You may say that, now,' replied the old fellow, with a very complicated wink 'I am the last of my family, Tom,' said the old gentleman, with a melancholy sigh.

'Was it a large one?' inquired Tom Smart

'There were twelve of us, Tom,' said the old gentleman, 'fine straight backed, handsome fellows as you'd wish to see None of your modern abortions—all with arms, and with a degree of polish, though I say it that should not, which would have done your heart good to behold'

'And what's become of the others, sir?' asked Tom Smart

The old gentleman applied his elbow to his eye as he replied, 'Gone, Tom, gone We had hard service, Tom, and they hadn't all my constitution They got rheumatic about the legs and arms, and went into kitchens and other hospitals, and one of 'em, with long service and hard usage, positively lost his senses—he got so crazy that he was obliged to be burnt Shocking thing that, Tom'

'Dreadful!' said Tom Smart

The old fellow paused for a few minutes, apparently struggling with his feelings of emotion, and then said

'However, Tom, I am wandering from the point This tall man, Tom, is a rascally adventurer The moment he married the widow, he would sell off all the furniture, and run away What would be the consequence? She would be deserted and reduced to ruin, and I should catch my death of cold in some broker's shop'

'Yes, but——'

'Don't interrupt me,' said the old gentleman 'Of

you, Tom, I entertain a very different opinion, for I well know that if you once settled yourself in a public house, you would never leave it, as long as there was anything to drink within its walls'

'I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion, sir,' said Tom Smart

'Therefore,' resumed the old gentleman, in a dictatorial tone, 'you shall have her, and he shall not'

'What is to prevent it?' said Tom Smart, eagerly

'This disclosure,' replied the old gentleman, 'he is already married'

'How can I prove it?' said Tom, starting half out of bed

The old gentleman untucked his arm from his side, and having pointed to one of the oaken presses, immediately replaced it in its old position

'He little thinks,' said the old gentleman, 'that in the right hand pocket of a pair of trousers in that press, he has left a letter, entreating him to return to his disconsolate wife, with six—mark me, Tom—six babes, and all of them small ones'

As the old gentleman solemnly uttered these words, his features grew less and less distinct, and his figure more shadowy. A film came over Tom Smart's eyes. The old man seemed gradually blending into the chair, the damask waistcoat to resolve into a cushion, the red slippers to shrink into little red cloth bags. The light faded gently away, and Tom Smart fell back on his pillow, and dropped asleep

Morning aroused Tom from the lethargic slumber, into which he had fallen on the disappearance of the old man. He sat up in bed, and for some minutes vainly endeavoured to recall the events of the preceding night. Suddenly they rushed upon him. He looked at the chair, it was a fantastic and grim looking piece of furniture, certainly, but it must have been a remarkably ingenious and lively imagination, that could have discovered any resemblance between it and an old man



‘How are you, old boy?’ said Tom. He was bolder in the daylight—most men are.

The chair remained motionless, and spoke not a word.

‘Miserable morning,’ said Tom. No. The chair would not be drawn into conversation.

‘Which press did you point to?—you can tell me that,’ said Tom. Devil a word, gentlemen, the chair would say.

‘It’s not much trouble to open it, anyhow,’ said Tom, getting out of bed very deliberately. He walked up to one of the presses. The key was in the lock, he turned it, and opened the door. There *was* a pair of trousers there. He put his hand into the pocket, and drew forth the identical letter the old gentleman had described!

‘Queer sort of thing, this,’ said Tom Smart, looking first at the chair and then at the press, and then at the letter, and then at the chair again. ‘Very queer,’ said Tom. But, as there was nothing in either, to lessen the queerness, he thought he might as well dress himself, and settle the tall man’s business at once—just to put him out of his misery.

Tom surveyed the rooms he passed through, on his way down stairs, with the scrutinizing eye of a land lord, thinking it not impossible, that before long, they and their contents would be his property. The tall man was standing in the snug little bar, with his hands behind him, quite at home. He grinned vacantly at Tom. A casual observer might have supposed he did it, only to show his white teeth, but Tom Smart thought that a consciousness of triumph was passing through the place where the tall man’s mind would have been, if he had had any. Tom laughed in his face, and summoned the landlady.

‘Good morning, ma’am,’ said Tom Smart, closing the door of the little parlour as the widow entered.

‘Good morning, sir,’ said the widow. ‘What will you take for breakfast, sir?’

'Tom was thinking how he should open the case, so he made no answer

'There's a very nice ham,' said the widow, 'and a beautiful cold larded fowl! Shall I send 'em in, sir?'

These words roused Tom from his reflections. His admiration of the widow increased as she spoke. 'Thoughtful creature! Comfortable provider!'

'Who is that gentleman in the bar, ma'am?' inquired Tom.

'His name is Jinkins, sir,' said the widow, slightly blushing.

'He's a tall man,' said Tom.

'He is a very fine man, sir,' replied the widow, 'and a very nice gentleman.'

'Ah!' said Tom.

'Is there anything more you want, sir?' inquired the widow, rather puzzled by Tom's manner.

'Why, yes,' said Tom. 'My dear ma'am, will you have the kindness to sit down for one moment?'

The widow looked much amazed, but she sat down, and Tom sat down too, close beside her. 'I don't know how it happened, gentlemen—indeed my uncle used to tell me that Tom Smart said he didn't know how it happened either—but somehow or other the palm of Tom's hand fell upon the back of the widow's hand, and remained there while he spoke.'

'My dear ma'am,' said Tom Smart—he had always a great notion of committing the amiable—'My dear ma'am, you deserve a very excellent husband,—you do indeed.'

'Lor, sir!' said the widow—as well she might Tom's mode of commencing the conversation being rather unusual, not to say startling, the fact of his never having set eyes upon her before the previous night, being taken into consideration. 'Lor, sir!'

'I scorn to flatter, my dear ma'am,' said Tom Smart. 'You deserve a very admirable husband, and whoever he is, he'll be a very lucky man.' As Tom said this his

eye involuntarily wandered from the widow's face, to the comforts around him

The widow looked more puzzled than ever, and made an effort to rise. Tom gently pressed her hand, as if to detain her, and she kept her seat. Widows, gentlemen, are not usually timorous, as my uncle used to say

'I am sure I am very much obliged to you, sir, for your good opinion,' said the buxom landlady, half laughing, 'and if ever I marry again'—

'If,' said Tom Smart, looking very shrewdly out of the right hand corner of his left eye 'If'—

'Well,' said the widow, laughing outright this time 'When I do, I hope I shall have as good a husband as you describe'

'Jinkins to wit,' said Tom

'Lor, sir!' exclaimed the widow

'Oh, don't tell me,' said Tom, 'I know him'

'I am sure nobody who knows him, knows anything bad of him,' said the widow, bidding up at the mysterious air with which Tom had spoken

'Hem!' said Tom Smart

The widow began to think it was high time to cry, so she took out her handkerchief, and inquired whether Tom wished to insult her. whether he thought it like a gentleman to take away the character of another gentleman behind his back. why, if he had got anything to say, he didn't say it to the man, like a man, instead of terrifying a poor weak woman in that way, and so forth

'I'll say it to him fast enough,' said Tom, 'only I want you to hear it first'

'What is it?' inquired the widow, looking intently in Tom's countenance

'I'll astonish you,' said Tom, putting his hand in his pocket

'If it is, that he wants money,' said the widow, 'I know that already, and you needn't trouble yourself'

'Pooh, nonsense, that's nothing,' said Tom Smart  
'I want money 'Tan't that'

'Oh, dear, what can it be?' exclaimed the poor widow

'Don't be frightened,' said Tom Smart. He slowly drew forth the letter, and unfolded it. 'You won't scream?' said Tom, doubtfully

'No, no,' replied the widow, 'let me see it'

'You won't go fainting away, or any of that nonsense?' said Tom

'No, no,' returned the widow, hastily

'And don't run out, and blow him up,' said Tom, 'because I'll do all that for you, you had better not exert yourself'

'Well, well,' said the widow, 'let me see it'

'I will,' replied Tom Smart, and, with these words, he placed the letter in the widow's hand

Gentlemen, I have heard my uncle say, that Tom Smart said the widow's lamentations when she heard the disclosure would have pierced a heart of stone. Tom was certainly very tender hearted, but they pierced his, to the very core. The widow rocked herself to and fro, and wrung her hands

'Oh, the deception and villany of man!' said the widow

'Frightful, my dear ma'am, but compose yourself,' said Tom Smart

'Oh, I can't compose myself,' shrieked the widow  
'I shall never find any one else I can love so much!'

'Oh yes, you will, my dear soul,' said Tom Smart, letting fall a shower of the largest sized tears, in pity for the widow's misfortunes. Tom Smart, in the energy of his compassion, had put his arm round the widow's waist, and the widow, in a passion of grief, had clasped Tom's hand. She looked up in Tom's face, and smiled through her tears. Tom looked down in hers, and smiled through his

I never could find out, gentlemen, whether Tom did

or did not kiss the widow at that particular moment He used to tell my uncle he didn't, but I have my doubts about it Between ourselves, gentlemen, I rather think he did

At all events, Tom kicked the very tall man out at the front door half an hour after, and married the widow a month after And he used to drive about the country, with the clay coloured gig with red wheels, and the vixenish mare with the fast pace, till he gave up business many years afterwards, and went to France with his wife, and then the old house was pulled down'

# ANTHONY TROLLOPE

1815-1882

## THE JOURNEY TO PANAMA

[From *Lotta Schmidt, and other Stories* 1867]

THERE is perhaps no form of life in which men and women of the present day frequently find themselves for a time existing, so unlike their customary conventional life, as that experienced on board the large ocean steamers. On the voyages so made, separate friendships are formed and separate enmities are endured. Certain lines of temporary politics are originated by the energetic, and intrigues, generally innocent in their conclusions, are carried on with the keenest spirit by those to whom excitement is necessary, whereas the idle and torpid sink into insignificance and general contempt,—as it is their lot to do on board ship as in other places. But the enjoyments and activity of such a life do not display themselves till the third or fourth day of the voyage. The men and women at first regard each with distrust and ill concealed dislike. They by no means anticipate the strong feelings which are to arise, and look forward to ten, fifteen, or twenty days of gloom or sea sickness. Sea sickness disappears, as a general condition, on the evening of the second day, and the gloom about noon on the fourth. Then the men begin to think that the women are not so ugly, vulgar, and insipid, and the women drop their monosyllables, discontinue the close adherence to their own niches, which they first observed, and become affable, perhaps even beyond their wont on shore. And alliances spring up among the men themselves. On their first entrance to this new world, they generally regard each other with marked aversion, each thinking that those nearest to

him are low fellows, or perhaps worse, but by the fourth day, if not sooner, every man has his two or three intimate friends with whom he talks and smokes, and to whom he communicates those peculiar politics, and perhaps intrigues, of his own voyage. The female friendships are slower in their growth, for the suspicion of women is perhaps stronger than that of men, but when grown they also are stronger, and exhibit themselves sometimes in instances of feminine affection.

But the most remarkable alliances are those made between gentlemen and ladies. This is a matter of course on board ship quite as much as on shore, and it is of such an alliance that the present tale purports to tell the story. Such friendships, though they may be very dear, can seldom be very lasting. Though they may be full of sweet romance—for people become very romantic among the discomforts of a sea voyage—such romance is generally short lived and delusive, and occasionally is dangerous.

There are several of these great ocean routes, of which, by the common consent, as it seems, of the world, England is the centre. There is the Great Eastern line, running from Southampton across the Bay of Biscay and up the Mediterranean. It crosses the Isthmus of Suez, and branches away to Australia, to India, to Ceylon, and to China. There is the great American line, traversing the Atlantic to New York and Boston with the regularity of clockwork. The voyage here is so much a matter of every day routine, that romance has become scarce upon the route. There are one or two other North American lines, perhaps open to the same objection. Then there is the line of packets to the African coast—very romantic as I am given to understand, and there is the great West Indian route, to which the present little history is attached—great, not on account of our poor West Indian Islands, which cannot at the present moment make anything great, but because it spreads itself out from thence to Mexico and

Cuba, to Guana and the republics of Grenada and Venezuela, to Central America, the Isthmus of Panama, and from thence to California, Vancouver's Island, Peru and Chili

It may be imagined how various are the tribes which leave the shores of Great Britain by this route. There are Frenchmen for the French sugar islands, as a rule not very romantic, there are old Spaniards, Spaniards of Spain, seeking to renew their fortunes amidst the ruins of their former empire, and new Spaniards—Spaniards, that is, of the American republics, who speak Spanish, but are unlike the Don both in manners and physiognomy—men and women with a touch perhaps of Indian blood, very keen after dollars, and not much given to the graces of life. There are Dutch men too, and Danes, going out to their own islands. There are citizens of the stars and stripes, who find their way everywhere—and, alas! perhaps, now also citizens of the new Southern flag, with the palmetto leaf. And there are Englishmen of every shade and class, and Englishwomen also.

It is constantly the case that women are doomed to make the long voyage alone. Some are going out to join their husbands, some to find a husband, some few peradventure to leave a husband. Girls who have been educated at home in England, return to their distant homes across the Atlantic, and others follow their relatives who have gone before them as pioneers into a strange land. It must not be supposed that these females absolutely embark in solitude, putting their feet upon the deck without the aid of any friendly arm. They are generally consigned to some prudent elder, and appear as they first show themselves on the ship to belong to a party. But as often as not their real loneliness shows itself after a while. The prudent elder is not, perhaps, congenial, and by the evening of the fourth day a new friendship is created.

Not a long time since such a friendship was formed



under the circumstances which I am now about to tell. A young man—not very young, for he had turned his thirtieth year, but still a young man—left Southampton by one of the large West Indian steam boats, purposing to pass over the Isthmus of Panama, and thence up to California and Vancouver's Island. It would be too long to tell the cause which led to these distant voyagings. Suffice to say, it was not the accursed hunger after gold—*auri sacra fames*—which so took him, nor had he any purpose of permanently settling himself in those distant colonies of Great Britain. He was at the time a widower, and perhaps his home was bitter to him without the young wife whom he had early lost. As he stepped on board he was accompanied by a gentleman some fifteen years his senior, who was to be the companion of his sleeping apartment as far as St Thomas. The two had been introduced to each other, and therefore appeared as friends on board the *Serrapique*, but their acquaintance had commenced in Southampton, and my hero, Ralph Forrest by name, was alone in the world as he stood looking over the side of the ship at the retreating shores of Hampshire.

'I say, old fellow, we'd better see about our places,' said his new friend, slapping him on his back. Mr Matthew Morris was an old traveller, and knew how to become intimate with his temporary allies at a very short notice. A long course of travelling had knocked all bashfulness out of him, and when he had a mind to do so he could make any man his brother in half an hour, and any woman his sister in ten minutes.

'Places? what places?' said Forrest.

'A pretty fellow you are to go to California. If you don't look sharper than that you'll get little to drink and nothing to eat till you come back again. Don't you know the ship's as full as ever she can hold?'

Forrest acknowledged that she was full.

'There are places at table for about a hundred, and

we have a hundred and thirty on board As a matter of course those who don't look sharp will have to scramble However I've put cards on the plates and taken the seats We had better go down and see that none of these Spanish fellows oust us' So Forrest descended after his friend, and found that the long tables were already nearly full of expectant dinner-eaters When he took his place a future neighbour informed him, not in the most gracious voice, that he was encroaching on a lady's seat, and when he immediately attempted to leave that which he held, Mr Matthew Morris forbade him to do so Thus a little contest arose, which, however, happily was brought to a close without bloodshed The lady was not present at the moment, and the grumpy gentleman agreed to secure for himself a vacant seat on the other side

For the first three days the lady did not show herself The grumpy gentleman, who, as Forrest afterwards understood, was the owner of stores in Bridge town, Barbadoes, had other ladies with him also First came forth his daughter, creeping down to dinner on the second day, declaring that she would be unable to eat a morsel, and prophesying that she would be forced to retire in five minutes On this occasion, however, she agreeably surprised herself and her friends Then came the grumpy gentleman's wife, and the grumpy gentleman's wife's brother—on whose constitution the sea seemed to have an effect quite as violent as on that of the ladies, and lastly, at breakfast on the fourth day, appeared Miss Viner, and took her place as Mr Forrest's neighbour at his right hand

He had seen her before on deck, as she lay on one of the benches, vainly endeavouring to make herself comfortable, and had remarked to his companion that she was very unattractive and almost ugly Dear young ladies, it is thus that men always speak of you when they first see you on board ship' She was disconsolate, sick at heart, and ill at ease in body also She did not

like the sea. She did not in the least like the grumpy gentleman, in whose hands she was placed. She did not especially like the grumpy gentleman's wife, and she altogether hated the grumpy gentleman's daughter, who was the partner of her berth. That young lady had been very sick and very selfish, and Miss Viner had been very sick also, and perhaps equally selfish. They might have been angels, and yet have hated each other under such circumstances. It was no wonder that Mr Forrest thought her ugly as she twisted herself about on the broad bench, vainly striving to be comfortable.

'She'll brighten up wonderfully before we're in the tropics,' said Mr Morris. 'And you won't find her so bad then. It's she that is to sit next you.'

'Heaven forbid!' said Forrest. But, nevertheless, he was very civil to her when she did come down on the fourth morning. On board the West Indian Packets, the world goes down to its meals. In crossing between Liverpool and the States, the world goes up to them.

Miss Viner was by no means a very young lady. She also was nearly thirty. In guessing her age on board the ship the ladies said that she was thirty six, but the ladies were wrong. She was an Irish woman, and when seen on shore, in her natural state, and with all her wits about her, was by no means without attraction. She was bright eyed, with a clear dark skin, and good teeth, her hair was of a dark brown and glossy, and there was a touch of feeling and also of humour about her mouth, which would have saved her from Mr Forrest's ill considered criticism, had he first met her under more favourable circumstances.

'You'll see a good deal of her,' Mr Morris said to him, as they began to prepare themselves for luncheon, by a cigar immediately after breakfast. 'She's going across the Isthmus and down to Peru.'

'How on earth do you know?'

I pretty well know where they're all going by this time. Old Grumpy told me so. He has her in tow as

far as St Thomas, but knows nothing about her. He gives her up there to the captain. You'll have a chance of making yourself very agreeable as you run across with her to the Spanish main.'

Mr Forrest replied that he did not suppose he should know her much better than he did now, but he made no further remark as to her ugliness. She had spoken a word or two to him at table, and he had seen that her eyes were bright, and had found that her tone was sweet.

'I also am going to Panama,' he said to her, on the morning of the fifth day. The weather at that time was very fine, and the October sun as it shone on them, while hour by hour they made more towards the South, was pleasant and genial. The big ship lay almost without motion on the bosom of the Atlantic, as she was driven through the waters at the rate of twelve miles per hour. All was as pleasant now as things can be on board a ship, and Forrest had forgotten that Miss Viner had seemed so ugly to him when he first saw her. At this moment, as he spoke to her, they were running through the Azores, and he had been assisting her with his field glass to look for orange-groves on their sloping shores, orange groves they had not succeeded in seeing, but their failure had not disturbed their peace.

'I also am going to Panama.'

'Are you, indeed?' said she. 'Then I shall not feel so terribly alone and disconsolate. I have been looking forward with such fear to that journey on from St Thomas.'

'You shall not be disconsolate, if I can help it,' he said. 'I am not much of a traveller myself, but what I can do I will.'

'Oh, thank you!'

'It is a pity Mr Morris is not going on with you. He's at home everywhere, and knows the way across the Isthmus as well as he does down Regent Street.'

'Your friend, you mean?'

'My friend, if you call him so, and indeed I hope he is, for I like him. But I don't know more of him than I do of you. I also am as much alone as you are. Perhaps more so.'

'But,' she said, 'a man never suffers in being alone.'

'Oh! does he not? Don't think me uncivil, Miss Viner, if I say that you may be mistaken in that. You feel your own shoe when it pinches, but do not realize the tight boot of your neighbour.'

'Perhaps not,' said she. And then there was a pause, during which she pretended to look again for the orange groves. 'But there are worse things, Mr Forrester, than being alone in the world. It is often a woman's lot to wish that she were let alone.' Then she left him and retreated to the side of the grumpy gentleman's wife, feeling perhaps that it might be prudent to discontinue a conversation, which, seeing that Mr Forrester was quite a stranger to her, was becoming particular.

'You're getting on famously, my dear,' said the lady from Barbadoes.

'Pretty well, thank you, ma'am,' said Miss Viner.

'Mr Forrester seems to be making himself quite agreeable. I tell Amelia,'—Amelia was the young lady to whom in their joint cabin Miss Viner could not reconcile herself—'I tell Amelia that she is wrong not to receive attentions from gentlemen on board ship. If it is not carried too far,' and she put great emphasis on the 'too far'—'I see no harm in it.'

'Nor I, either,' said Miss Viner.

'But then Amelia is so particular.'

'The best way is to take such things as they come,' said Miss Viner,—perhaps meaning that such things never did come in the way of Amelia. 'If a lady knows what she is about she need not fear a gentleman's attentions.'

'That's just what I tell Amelia, but then, my dear, she has not had so much experience as you and I.'

Such being the amenities which passed between Miss

Viner and the prudent lady who had her in charge, it was not wonderful that the former should feel ill at ease with her own 'party', as the family of the Grumpy Barbadian was generally considered to be by those on board

'You're getting along like a house on fire with Miss Viner,' said Matthew Morris, to his young friend

'Not much fire I can assure you,' said Forrest

'She ain't so ugly as you thought her?'

'Ugly'—no, she's not ugly I don't think I ever said she was But she is nothing particular as regards beauty'

'No she won't be lovely for the next three days to come, I dare say By the time you reach Panama, she'll be all that is perfect in woman I know how these things go'

'Those sort of things don't go at all quickly with me,' said Forrest, gravely 'Miss Viner is a very interesting young woman, and as it seems that her route and mine will be together for some time, it is well that we should be civil to each other And the more so, seeing that the people she is with are not congenial to her'

'No, they are not There is no young man with them I generally observe that on board ship no one is congenial to unmarried ladies except unmarried men It is a recognized nautical rule Uncommon hot, isn't it? We are beginning to feel the tropical air I shall go and cool myself with a cigar in the fiddle' The 'fiddle' is a certain part of the ship devoted to smoking, and thither Mr Morris betook himself Forrest, however, did not accompany him, but going forward into the bow of the vessel, threw himself along upon the sail, and meditated on the loneliness of his life

On board the *Serrapiqui*, the upper tier of cabins opened on to a long gallery, which ran round that part of the ship, immediately over the saloon, so that from thence a pleasant inspection could be made of the viands as they were being placed on the tables The custom on

board these ships is for two bells to ring preparatory to dinner, at an interval of half an hour. At the sound of the first, ladies would go to their cabins to adjust their toilets, but as dressing for dinner is not carried to an extreme at sea, these operations are generally over before the second bell, and the lady passengers would generally assemble in the balcony for some fifteen minutes before dinner. At first they would stand here alone, but by degrees they were joined by some of the more enterprising of the men, and so at last a kind of little drawing room was formed. The cabins of Miss Viner's party opened to one side of this gallery, and that of Mr Morris and Forrest on the other. Hitherto Forrest had been contented to remain on his own side, occasionally throwing a word across to the ladies on the other, but on this day he boldly went over as soon as he had washed his hands and took his place between Amelia and Miss Viner.

'We are dreadfully crowded here, ma'am,' said Amelia.

'Yes, my dear, we are,' said her mother. 'But what can one do?'

'There's plenty of room in the ladies' cabin,' said Miss Viner. Now if there be one place on board a ship more distasteful to ladies than another, it is the ladies' cabin. Mr Forrest stood his ground, but it may be doubted whether he would have done so had he fully understood all that Amelia had intended.

Then the last bell rang. Mr Grumpy gave his arm to Miss Grumpy. The brother in law gave his arm to Amelia, and Forrest did the same to Miss Viner. She hesitated for a moment, and then took it, and by so doing transferred herself mentally and bodily from the charge of the prudent and married Mr Grumpy to that of the perhaps imprudent, and certainly unmarried Mr Forrest. She was wrong. A kind-hearted, motherly old lady from Jamaica, who had seen it all, knew that she was wrong, and wished that she could tell her so.

But there are things of this sort which kind hearted old ladies cannot find it in their hearts to say. After all, it was only for the voyage. Perhaps Miss Viner was imprudent, but who in Peru would be the wiser? Perhaps, indeed, it was the world that was wrong, and not Miss Viner. *Hon! soit qui mal y pense*, she said to herself, as she took his arm, and leaning on it, felt that she was no longer so lonely as she had been. On that day she allowed him to give her a glass of wine out of his decanter. 'Hadn't you better take mine, Miss Viner?' asked Mr Grumpy, in a loud voice, but before he could be answered, the deed had been done.

'Don't go too fast, old fellow,' Morris said to our hero that night, as they were walking the deck together before they turned in. 'One gets into a hobble in such matters before one knows where one is.'

'I don't think I have anything particular to fear,' said Forrest.

'I dare say not, only keep your eyes open. Such haridans as Mrs Grumpy allow any latitude to their tongues out in these diggings. You'll find that unpleasant tidings will be put on board the ship going down to Panama, and everybody's eye will be upon you.' So warned, Mr Forrest did put himself on his guard, and the next day and a half his intimacy with Miss Viner progressed but little. These were, probably, the dulllest hours that he had on the whole voyage.

Miss Viner saw this and drew back. On the afternoon of that second day she walked a turn or two on deck with the weak brother in law, and when Mr Forrest came near her, she applied herself to her book. She meant no harm, but if she were not afraid of what people might say, why should he be so? So she turned her shoulder towards him at dinner, and would not drink of his cup.

'Have some of mine, Miss Viner,' said Mr Grumpy, very loudly. But on that day Miss Viner drank no wine.



The sun sets quickly as one draws near to the tropics, and the day was already gone, and the dusk had come on, when Mr Forrest walked out upon the deck that evening a little after six. But the night was beautiful and mild, and there was a hum of many voices from the benches. He was already uncomfortable, and sore with a sense of being deserted. There was but one person on board the ship that he liked, and why should he avoid her and be avoided? He soon perceived where she was standing. The Grumpy family had a bench to themselves, and she was opposite to it, on her feet, leaning against the side of the vessel. 'Will you walk this evening, Miss Viner?' he asked.

'I think not,' she answered.

'Then I shall persevere in asking till you are sure it will do you good, for I have not seen you walking all day.'

'Have you not? Then I will take a turn. Oh, Mr Forrest, if you knew what it was to have to live with such people as those.' And then, out of that, on that evening, there grew up between them something like the confidence of real friendship. Things were told such as none but friends do tell to one another, and warm answering words were spoken such as the sympathy of friendship produces. Alas, they were both foolish, for friendship and sympathy should have deeper roots.

She told him all her story. She was going out to Peru to be married to a man who was nearly twenty years her senior. It was a long engagement, of ten years' standing. When first made, it was made as being contingent on certain circumstances. An option of escaping from it had then been given to her, but now there was no longer an option. He was rich, and she was penniless. He had even paid her passage-money and her outfit. She had not at last given way and taken these irrevocable steps till her only means of support in England had been taken from her. She had

lived the last two years with a relative who was now dead 'And he also is my cousin,—a distant cousin—you understand that'

'And do you love him?'

'Love him' What, as you loved her whom you have lost?—as she loved you when she clung to you before she went? No, certainly not I shall never know anything of that love'

'And is he good?'

'He is a hard man Men become hard when they deal in money as he has done He was home five years since, and then I swore to myself that I would not marry him But his letters to me are kind'

Forrest sat silent for a minute or two, for they were up in the bow again, seated on the sail that was bound round the bowsprit, and then he answered her, 'A woman should never marry a man unless she loves him'

'Ah,' says she, 'of course you will condemn me That is the way in which women are always treated They have no choice given them, and are then scolded for choosing wrongly'

'But you might have refused him'

'No, I could not I cannot make you understand the whole,—how it first came about that the marriage was proposed, and agreed to by me under certain conditions Those conditions have come about, and I am now bound to him I have taken his money and have no escape It is easy to say that a woman should not marry without love, as easy as it is to say that a man should not starve But there are men who starve,—starve although they work hard'

'I did not mean to judge you, Miss Viner'

'But I judge myself, and condemn myself so often Where should I be in half an hour from this if I were to throw myself forward into the sea? I often long to do it Don't you feel tempted sometimes to put an end to it all?'

'The waters look cool and sweet, but I own I am afraid of the bourne beyond'

'So am I, and that fear will keep me from it'

'We are bound to bear our burden of sorrow Mine, I know, is heavy enough'

'Yours, Mr Forrest' Have you not all the pleasures of memory to fall back on, and every hope for the future? What can I remember, or what can I hope? But, however, it is near eight o'clock, and they have all been at tea this hour past What will my Cerberus say to me? I do not mind the male mouth, if only the two feminine mouths could be stopped' Then she rose and went back to the stern of the vessel, but as she slid into a seat, she saw that Mrs Grumpy was standing over her

From thence to St Thomas the voyage went on in the customary manner The sun became very powerful, and the passengers in the lower part of the ship complained loudly of having their portholes closed The Spaniards sat gambling in the cabin all day, and the ladies prepared for the general move which was to be made at St Thomas The alliance between Forrest and Miss Viner went on much the same as ever, and Mrs Grumpy said very ill natured things On one occasion she ventured to lecture Miss Viner, but that lady knew how to take her own part, and Mrs Grumpy did not get the best of it The dangerous alliance, I have said, went on the same as ever, but it must not be supposed that either person in any way committed aught that was wrong They sat together and talked together, each now knowing the other's circumstances, but had it not been for the prudish caution of some of the ladies there would have been nothing amiss As it was there was not much amiss Few of the passengers really cared whether or no Miss Viner had found an admirer Those who were going down to Panama were mostly Spaniards, and as the great separation became nearer, people had somewhat else of which to think

And then the separation came. They rode into that pretty harbour of St Thomas early in the morning, and were ignorant, the most of them, that they were lying in the very worst centre of yellow fever among all those plague-spotted islands. St Thomas is very pretty as seen from the ships, and when that has been said, all has been said that can be said in its favour. There was a busy, bustling time of it then. One vessel after another was brought up alongside of the big ship that had come from England, and each took its separate freight of passengers and luggage. First started the boat that ran down the Leeward Islands to Demerara, taking with her Mr Grumpy and all his family.

'Good bye, Miss Viner,' said Mrs Grumpy. 'I hope you'll get quite safely to the end of your voyage, but do take care.'

'I'm sure I hope everything will be right,' said Amelia, as she absolutely kissed her enemy. It is astonishing how well young women can hate each other, and yet kiss at parting.

'As to everything being right,' said Miss Viner, 'that is too much to hope. But I do not know that anything is going especially wrong—Good bye, Sir,' and then she put out her hand to Mr Grumpy. He was at the moment leaving the ship laden with umbrellas, sticks, and coats, and was forced to put them down in order to free his hand.

'Well, good bye,' he said. 'I hope you'll do, till you meet your friends at the Isthmus.'

'I hope I shall, sir,' she replied, and so they parted. Then the Jamaica packet started.

'I dare say we shall never see each other again,' said Morris, as he shook his friend's hand heartily. 'One never does. Don't interfere with the rights of that gentleman in Peru, or he might run a knife into you.'

'I feel no inclination to injure him on that point.'

'That's well, and now good bye.' And thus they also were parted. On the following morning the branch

ship was dispatched to Mexico, and then, on the afternoon of the third day that for Colon—as we Englishmen call the town on this side of the Isthmus of Panama. Into that vessel Miss Viner and Mr Forrest moved themselves and their effects, and now that the three-headed Cerberus was gone, she had no longer hesitated in allowing him to do for her all those little things which it is well that men should do for women when they are travelling. A woman without assistance under such circumstances is very forlorn, very apt to go to the wall, very ill able to assert her rights as to accommodation, and I think that few can blame Miss Viner for putting herself and her belongings under the care of the only person who was disposed to be kind to her.

Late in the evening the vessel steamed out of St Thomas' harbour, and as she went Ralph Forrest and Emily Viner were standing together at the stern of the boat looking at the retreating lights of the Danish town. If there be a place on the earth's surface odious to me, it is that little Danish isle to which so many of our young seamen are sent to die,—there being no good cause whatever for such sending. But the question is one which cannot well be argued here.

'I have five more days of self and liberty left me,' said Miss Viner. 'That is my life's allowance.'

'For heaven's sake do not say words that are so horrible.'

'But am I to lie for heaven's sake, and say words that are false, or shall I be silent for heaven's sake, and say nothing during these last hours that are allowed to me for speaking? It is so. To you I can say that it is so, and why should you begrudge me the speech?'

'I would begrudge you nothing that I could do for you.'

'No, you should not. Now that my incubus has gone to Barbadoes, let me be free for a day or two. What chance is there, I wonder, that the ship's machinery should all go wrong, and that we should be tossed about

in the seas here for the next six months ? I suppose it would be very wicked to wish it ? '

' We should all be starved , that 's all '

' What, with a cow on board, and a dozen live sheep, and thousands of cocks and hens ' But we are to touch at Santa Martha and Cartagena What would happen to me if I were to run away at Santa Martha ? '

' I suppose I should be bound to run with you '

' Oh, of course And therefore, as I would not wish to destroy you, I won't do it But it would not hurt you much to be shipwrecked, and wait for the next packet '

' Miss Viner,' he said after a pause,—and in the meantime he had drawn nearer to her, too near to her considering all things—' in the name of all that is good, and true, and womanly, go back to England With your feelings, if I may judge of them by words which are spoken half in jest—'

' Mr Forrest, there is no jest '

' With your feelings a poorhouse in England would be better than a palace in Peru '

' An English workhouse would be better, but an English poorhouse is not open to me You do not know what it is to have friends—no, not friends, but people belonging to you—just so near as to make your respectability a matter of interest to them, but not so near that they should care for your happiness Emily Viner married to Mr Gorloch in Peru is put out of the way respectably She will cause no further trouble, but her name may be mentioned in family circles without annoyance The fact is, Mr Forrest, that there are people who have no business to live at all '

' I would go back to England,' he added, after another pause ' When you talk to me with such bitterness of five more days of living liberty you scare my very soul Return, Miss Viner, and brave the worst He is to meet you at Panama Remain on this side of the Isthmus, and send him word that you must return I will be the bearer of the message '

'And shall I walk back to England?' said Miss Viner

'I had not quite forgotten all that,' he replied, very gently 'There are moments when a man may venture to propose that which under ordinary circumstances would be a liberty Money, in a small moderate way, is not greatly an object to me As a return for my valiant defence of you against your West Indian Cerberus, you shall allow me to arrange that with the agent at Colon'

'I do so love plain English, Mr Forrest You are proposing, I think, to give me something about fifty guineas'

'Well, call it so if you will,' said he, 'if you will have plain English that is what I mean'

'So that by my journey out here, I should rob and deceive the man I do know, and also rob the man I don't know I am afraid of that bourne beyond the waters of which we spoke, but I would rather face that than act as you suggest'

'Of the feelings between him and you, I can of course be no judge'

'No, no, you cannot But what a beast I am not to thank you! I do thank you That which it would be mean in me to take, it is noble, very noble, in you to offer It is a pleasure to me—I cannot tell why—but it is a pleasure to me to have had the offer But think of me as a sister, and you will feel that it would not be accepted,—could not be accepted, I mean, even if I could bring myself to betray that other man'

Thus they ran across the Caribbean Sea, renewing very often such conversations as that just given They touched at Santa Martha and Cartagena on the coast of the Spanish main, and at both places he went with her on shore He found that she was fairly well educated, and anxious to see and to learn all that might be seen and learned in the course of her travels On the last day, as they neared the Isthmus, she became

more tranquil and quiet in the expression of her feelings than before, and spoke with less of gloom than she had done

'After all ought I not to love him?' she said 'He is coming all the way up from Callao merely to meet me What man would go from London to Moscow to pick up a wife?'

'I would—and thence round the world to Moscow again—if she were the wife I wanted'

'Yes, but a wife who has never said that she loved you! It is purely a matter of convenience Well, I have locked my big box, and I shall give the key to him before it is ever again unlocked He has a right to it, for he has paid for nearly all that it holds'

'You look at things from such a mundane point of view'

'A woman should, or she will always be getting into difficulty Mind, I shall introduce you to him, and tell him all that you have done for me How you braved Cerberus and the rest of it'

'I shall certainly be glad to meet him'

'But I shall not tell him of your offer,—not yet at least If he be good and gentle with me, I shall tell him that too after a time I am very bad at keeping secrets,—as no doubt you have perceived We go across the Isthmus at once, do we not?'

'So the Captain says'

'Look!—and she handed him back his own field-glass 'I can see the men on the wooden platform Yes, and I can see the smoke of an engine' And then, in little more than an hour from that time the ship had swung round on her anchor

Colon, or Aspinwall as it should be called, is a place in itself as detestable as St Thomas It is not so odious to an Englishman, for it is not used by Englishmen more than is necessary We have no great depot of traffic there, which we might with advantage move elsewhere Taken, however, on its own merits, Aspinwall is not a



detestable place. Luckily, however, travellers across the Isthmus to the Pacific are never doomed to remain there long. If they arrive early in the day, the railway thence to Panama takes them on at once. If it be not so, they remain on board ship till the next morning. Of course it will be understood that the transit line chiefly affects Americans, as it is the highroad from New York to California.

In less than an hour from their landing, their baggage had been examined by the Custom House officers of New Grenada, and they were on the railway cars, crossing the Isthmus. The officials in those out-of-the-way places always seem like apes imitating the doings of men. The officers at Aspinwall open and look at the trunks just as monkeys might do, having clearly no idea of any duty to be performed, nor any conception that goods of this or that class should not be allowed to pass. It is the thing in Europe to examine luggage going into a new country, and why should not they be as good as Europeans?

'I wonder whether he will be at the station?' she said, when the three hours of the journey had nearly passed. Forrest could perceive that her voice trembled as she spoke, and that she was becoming nervous.

'If he has already reached Panama, he will be there. As far as I could learn the arrival up from Peru had not been telegraphed.'

'Then I have another day,—perhaps two. We cannot say how many. I wish he were there. Nothing is so intolerable as suspense.'

'And the box must be opened again.'

When they reached the station at Panama they found that the vessel from the South American coast was in the roads, but that the passengers were not yet on shore. Forrest, therefore, took Miss Viner down to the hotel, and there remained with her, sitting next to her in the common drawing room of the house, when she had come back from her own bedroom. It would be necessary

that they should remain there four or five days, and Forrest had been quick in securing a room for her. He had assisted in taking up her luggage, had helped her in placing her big box, and had thus been recognized by the crowd in the hotel as her friend. Then came the tidings that the passengers were landing, and he became nervous as she was. 'I will go down and meet him,' said he, 'and tell him that you are here. I shall soon find him by his name.' And so he went out.

Everybody knows the scrambling manner in which passengers arrive at an hotel out of a big ship. First came two or three energetic, heated men, who, by dint of screeching and bullying, have gotten themselves first disposed. They always get the worst rooms at the inns, the housekeepers having a notion that the richest people, those with the most luggage, must be more tardy in their movements. Four or five of this nature passed by Forrest in the hall, but he was not tempted to ask questions of them. One, from his age, might have been Mr Gorloch, but he instantly declared himself to be Count Sapparello. Then came an elderly man alone, with a small bag in his hand. He was one of those who pride themselves on going from pole to pole without encumbrance, and who will be behoved to no one for the carriage of their luggage. To him, as he was alone in the street, Forrest addressed himself. 'Gorloch,' said he, 'Gorloch, are you a friend of his?'

'A friend of mine is so,' said Forrest.

'Ah, indeed, yes,' said the other. And then he hesitated. 'Sir,' he then said, 'Mr Gorloch died at Callao, just seven days before the ship sailed. You had better see Mr Cox.' And then the elderly man passed in with his little bag.

Mr Gorloch was dead. 'Dead!' said Forrest, to himself, as he leaned back against the wall of the hotel still standing on the street pavement. 'She has come out here, and now he is gone.' And then a thousand

thoughts crowded on him Who should tell her ? And how would she bear it ? Would it in truth be a relief to her to find that that liberty for which she had sighed had come to her ? Or now that the testing of her feelings had come to her, would she regret the loss of home and wealth, and such position as life in Peru would give her ? And above all would this sudden death of one who was to have been so near to her, strike her to the heart ?

But what was he to do ? How was he now to show his friendship ? He was returning slowly in at the hotel door, where crowds of men and women were now thronging, when he was addressed by a middle aged, good-looking gentleman, who asked him whether his name was Forrest 'I am told,' said the gentleman, when Forrest had answered him, 'that you are a friend of Miss Viner's Have you heard the sad tidings from Callao ?' It then appeared that this gentleman had been a stranger to Mr Gorloch, but had undertaken to bring a letter up to Miss Viner This letter was handed to Mr Forrest, and he found himself burdened with the task of breaking the news to his poor friend Whatever he did do, he must do at once, for all those who had come up by the Pacific steamer knew the story, and it was incumbent on him that Miss Viner should not hear the tidings in a sudden manner and from a stranger's mouth

He went up into the drawing room, and found Miss Viner seated there in the midst of a crew of women He went up to her, and taking her hand, asked her in a whisper whether she would come out with him for a moment

'Where is he ?' said she 'I know that something is the matter What is it ?'

'There is such a crowd here Step out for a moment' And he led her away to her own room

'Where is he ?' said she 'What is the matter ? He has sent to say that he no longer wants me Tell me, am I free from him ?'

'Miss Viner, you are free'

Though she had asked the question herself, she was astounded by the answer, but, nevertheless, no idea of the truth had yet come upon her 'It is so,' she said 'Well, what else? Has he written? He has bought me, as he would a beast of burden, and has, I suppose, a right to treat me as he pleases'

'I have a letter, but, dear Miss Viner—'

'Well, tell me all,—out at once Tell me everything'

'You are free, Miss Viner, but you will be cut to the heart when you learn the meaning of your freedom'

'He has lost everything in trade He is ruined'

'Miss Viner, he is dead!'

She stood staring at him for a moment or two, as though she could not realize the information which he gave her Then gradually she retreated to the bed, and sat upon it 'Dead, Mr Forrest!' she said He did not answer her, but handed her the letter, which she took and read as though it were mechanically The letter was from Mr Gorloch's partner, and told her everything which it was necessary that she should know

'Shall I leave you now?' he said, when he saw that she had finished reading it

'Leave me, yes,—no But you had better leave me, and let me think about it Alas me, that I should have so spoken of him!'

'But you have said nothing unkind'

'Yes, much that was unkind But spoken words cannot be recalled Let me be alone now, but come to me soon There is no one else here that I can speak to'

He went out, and finding that the hotel dinner was ready, he went in and dined Then he strolled into the town, among the hot, narrow, dilapidated streets, and then, after two hours' absence, returned to Miss Viner's room When he knocked, she came and opened the door, and he found that the floor was strewn with clothes 'I am preparing, you see, for my return The vessel starts back for St Thomas the day after to-morrow'

You are quite right to go,—to go at once Oh, Miss Viner ' Emily, now at least you must let me help you '

He had been thinking of her most during those last two hours, and her voice had become pleasant to his ears, and her eyes very bright to his sight

' You shall help me,' she said ' Are you not helping me when at such a time you come to speak to me ? '

' And you will let me think that I have a right to act as your protector ? '

' My protector ' I do know that I want such aid as that During the days that we are here together you shall be my friend '

' You shall not return alone My journeys are nothing to me Emily, I will return with you to England '

Then she rose up from her seat and spoke to him

' Not for the world,' she said ' Putting out of question the folly of your forgetting your own objects, do you think it possible that I should go with you, now that he is dead ? To you I have spoken of him harshly, and now that it is my duty to mourn for him, could I do so heartily if you were with me ? While he lived, it seemed to me that in those last days I had a right to speak my thoughts plainly You and I were to part and meet no more, and I regarded us both as people apart, who for a while might drop the common usages of the world It is so no longer Instead of going with you farther, I must ask you to forget that we were ever together '

' Emily, I shall never forget you '

' Let your tongue forget me I have given you no cause to speak good of me, and you will be too kind to speak evil '

After that she explained to him all that the letter had contained The arrangements for her journey had all been made, money also had been sent to her, and Mr Gorloch in his will had provided for her, not liberally, seeing that he was rich, but still sufficiently

And so they parted at Panama She would not allow

him even to cross the Isthmus with her, but pressed his hand warmly as he left her at the station 'God bless you!' he said 'And may God bless you, my friend!' she answered

Thus alone she took her departure for England, and he went on his way to California (1861)

### LA MÈRE BAUCHE

[From *Tales of all Countries* 1861]

THE Pyrenean valley in which the baths of Vernet are situated is not much known to English, or indeed to any travellers. Tourists in search of good hotels and picturesque beauty combined, do not generally extend their journeys to the Eastern Pyrenees. They rarely get beyond Luchon, and in this they are right, as they thus end their peregrinations at the most lovely spot among these mountains, and are as a rule so deceived, imposed on, and bewildered by guides, innkeepers, and horse owners at this otherwise delightful place as to become undesirous of further travel. Nor do invalids from distant parts frequent Vernet. People of fashion go to the Eaux Bonnes and to Luchon, and people who are really ill to Bareges and Caunterets. It is at these places that one meets crowds of Parisians, and the daughters and wives of rich merchants from Bordeaux, with an admixture, now by no means inconsiderable, of Englishmen and Englishwomen. But the Eastern Pyrenees are still unfrequented. And probably they will remain so, for though there are among them lovely valleys—and of all such the valley of Vernet is perhaps the most lovely—they cannot compete with the mountain scenery of other tourists loved regions in Europe. At the Port de Venasquez and the Breche de Roland in the Western Pyrenees, or rather, to speak more truly,

at spots in the close vicinity of these famous mountain entrances from France into Spain, one can make comparisons with Switzerland, Northern Italy, the Tyrol, and Ireland, which will not be injurious to the scenes then under view. But among the eastern mountains this can rarely be done. The hills do not stand thickly together so as to group themselves, the passes from one valley to another, though not wanting in altitude, are not close pressed together with overhanging rocks, and are deficient in grandeur as well as loveliness. And then, as a natural consequence of all this, the hotels—are not quite as good as they should be.

But there is one mountain among them which can claim to rank with the Pic du Midi or the Maledetta. No one can pooch pooch the stern old Canigou, standing high and solitary, solemn and grand, between the two roads which run from Perpignan into Spain, the one by Prades and the other by Le Boulon. Under the Canigou, towards the west, lie the hot baths of Vernet, in a close secluded valley, which, as I have said before, is, as far as I know, the sweetest spot in these Eastern Pyrenees.

The frequenters of these baths were a few years back gathered almost entirely from towns not very far distant, from Perpignan, Narbonne, Carcassonne, and Béziers, and were not therefore famous, expensive, or luxurious, but those who believed in them believed with great faith, and it was certainly the fact that men and women who went thither worn with toil, sick with excesses, and nervous through over care, came back fresh and strong, fit once more to attack the world with all its woes. Their character in latter days does not seem to have changed, though their circle of admirers may perhaps be somewhat extended.

In those days, by far the most noted and illustrious person in the village of Vernet was La Mere Bauche. That there had once been a Pere Bauche was known to the world, for there was a Fils Bauche who lived with

his mother, but no one seemed to remember more of him than that he had once existed. At Vernet he had never been known. La Mère Bauche was a native of the village, but her married life had been passed away from it, and she had returned in her early widowhood to become proprietress and manager, or, as one may say, the heart and soul of the Hôtel Bauche at Vernet.

This hotel was a large and somewhat rough establishment, intended for the accommodation of invalids who came to Vernet for their health. It was built immediately over one of the thermal springs, so that the water flowed from the bowels of the earth directly into the baths. There was accommodation for seventy people, and during the summer and autumn months the place was always full. Not a few also were to be found there during the winter and spring, for the charges of Madame Bauche were low, and the accommodation reasonably good.

And in this respect, as indeed in all others, Madame Bauche had the reputation of being an honest woman. She had a certain price, from which no earthly consideration would induce her to depart, and certain returns for this price in the shape of dejeuners and dinners, baths and beds, which she never failed to give in accordance with the dictates of a strict conscience. These were traits in the character of an hotel-keeper which cannot be praised too highly, and which had met their due reward in the custom of the public. But nevertheless there were those who thought that there was occasionally ground for complaint in the conduct even of Madame Bauche.

In the first place she was deficient in that pleasant smiling softness which should belong to any keeper of a house of public entertainment. In her general mode of life she was stern and silent with her guests, autocratic, authoritative, and sometimes contradictory in her house, and altogether irrational and unconciliatory when any change even for a day was proposed to her,



or when any shadow of a complaint reached her ears

Indeed of complaint, as made against the establishment, she was altogether intolerant To such she had but one answer He or she who complained might leave the place at a moment's notice if it so pleased them There were always others ready to take their places The power of making this answer came to her from the lowness of her prices, and it was a power which was very dear to her

The baths were taken at different hours according to medical advice, but the usual time was from five to seven in the morning The *dejeuner* or early meal was at nine o'clock, the dinner was at four After that, no eating or drinking was allowed in the *Hôtel Bauche* There was a cafe in the village, at which ladies and gentlemen could get a cup of coffee or a glass of *eau sucre*, but no such accommodation was to be had in the establishment Not by any possible bribery or persuasion could any meal be procured at any other than the authorized hours A visitor who should enter the *salle à manger* more than ten minutes after the last bell would be looked at very sourly by Madame Bauche, who on all occasions sat at the top of her own table Should any one appear as much as half an hour late, he would receive only his share of what had not been handed round But after the last dish had been so handed, it was utterly useless for any one to enter the room at all

Her appearance at the period of our tale was perhaps not altogether in her favour She was about sixty years of age and was very stout and short in the neck She wore her own grey hair, which at dinner was always tidy enough, but during the whole day previous to that hour she might be seen with it escaping from under her cap in extreme disorder Her eyebrows were large and bushy, but those alone would not have given to her face that look of indomitable sternness which it possessed

Her eyebrows were serious in their effect, but not so serious as the pair of green spectacles which she always wore under them. It was thought by those who had analyzed the subject that the great secret of Madame Bauche's power lay in her green spectacles.

Her custom was to move about and through the whole establishment every day from breakfast till the period came for her to dress for dinner. She would visit every chamber and every bath, walk once or twice round the *salle à manger*, and very repeatedly round the kitchen, she would go into every hole and corner, and peer into everything through her green spectacles, and in these walks it was not always thought pleasant to meet her. Her custom was to move very slowly, with her hands generally clasped behind her back, she rarely spoke to the guests unless she was spoken to, and on such occasions she would not often diverge into general conversation. If any one had aught to say connected with the business of the establishment, she would listen, and then she would make her answers,—often not pleasant in the hearing.

And thus she walked her path through the world, a stern, hard, solemn old woman, not without gusts of passionate explosion, but honest withal, and not without some inward benevolence and true tenderness of heart. Children she had had many, some seven or eight. One or two had died, others had been married, she had sons settled far away from home, and at the time of which we are now speaking but one was left in any way subject to parental authority.

Adolphe Bauche was the only one of her children of whom much was remembered by the present denizens and hangers on of the hotel. He was the youngest of the number, and having been born only very shortly before the return of Madame Bauche to Vernet, had been altogether reared there. It was thought by the world of those parts, and rightly thought, that he was his mother's darling—more so than had been any of his

brothers and sisters,—the very apple of her eye, and gem of her life. At this time he was about twenty five years of age, and for the last two years had been absent from Vernet—for reasons which will shortly be made to appear. He had been sent to Paris to see something of the world, and learn to talk French instead of the patois of his valley, and having left Paris had come down south into Languedoc, and remained there picking up some agricultural lore which it was thought might prove useful in the valley farms of Vernet. He was now expected home again very speedily, much to his mother's delight.

That she was kind and gracious to her favourite child does not perhaps give much proof of her benevolence, but she had also been kind and gracious to the orphan child of a neighbour, nay, to the orphan child of a rival innkeeper. At Vernet there had been more than one water establishment, but the proprietor of the second had died some few years after Madame Bauche had settled herself at the place. His house had not thrived, and his only child, a little girl, was left altogether without provision.

This little girl, Marie Clavert, La Mere Bauche had taken into her own house immediately after the father's death, although she had most cordially hated that father. Marie was then an infant, and Madame Bauche had accepted the charge without much thought, perhaps, as to what might be the child's ultimate destiny. But since then she had thoroughly done the duty of a mother by the little girl, who had become the pet of the whole establishment, the favourite plaything of Adolphe Bauche,—and at last of course his early sweetheart.

And then and therefore there had come troubles at Vernet. Of course all the world of the valley had seen what was taking place and what was likely to take place, long before Madame Bauche knew anything about it. But at last it broke upon her senses that her son, Adolphe Bauche, the heir to all her virtues and all her

riches, the first young man in that or any neighbouring valley, was absolutely contemplating the idea of marrying that poor little orphan, Marie Clavert !

That any one should ever fall in love with Marie Clavert had never occurred to Madame Bauche. She had always regarded the child as a child, as the object of her charity, and as a little thing to be looked on as poor Marie by all the world. She, looking through her green spectacles, had never seen that Marie Clavert was a beautiful creature, full of ripening charms, such as young men love to look on. Marie was of infinite daily use to Madame Bauche in a hundred little things about the house, and the old lady thoroughly recognized and appreciated her ability. But for this very reason she had never taught herself to regard Marie otherwise than as a useful drudge. She was very fond of her protégé—so much so that she would listen to her in affairs about the house when she would listen to no one else,—but Marie's prettiness and grace and sweetness as a girl had all been thrown away upon Maman Bauche, as Marie used to call her.

But unluckily it had not been thrown away upon Adolphe. He had appreciated, as it was natural that he should do, all that had been so utterly indifferent to his mother, and consequently had fallen in love. Consequently also he had told his love, and consequently also, Marie had returned his love. Adolphe had been hitherto contradicted but in few things, and thought that all difficulty would be prevented by his informing his mother that he wished to marry Marie Clavert. But Marie, with a woman's instinct, had known better. She had trembled and almost crouched with fear when she confessed her love, and had absolutely hid herself from sight when Adolphe went forth, prepared to ask his mother's consent to his marriage.

The indignation and passionate wrath of Madame Bauche were past and gone two years before the date of this story, and I need not therefore much enlarge

upon that subject She was at first abusive and bitter, which was bad for Marie, and afterwards bitter and silent, which was worse It was of course determined that poor Marie should be sent away to some asylum for orphans or penniless paupers—in short anywhere out of the way What mattered her outlook into the world, her happiness, or indeed her very existence? The outlook and happiness of Adolphe Bauche,—was not that to be considered as everything at Vernet?

But this terrible sharp aspect of affairs did not last very long In the first place La Mere Bauche had under those green spectacles a heart that in truth was tender and affectionate, and after the first two days of anger she admitted that something must be done for Marie Clavert, and after the fourth day she acknowledged that the world of the hotel, her world, would not go as well without Marie Clavert as it would with her And in the next place Madame Bauche had a friend whose advice in grave matters she would sometimes take This friend had told her that it would be much better to send away Adolphe, since it was so necessary that there should be a sending away of some one, that he would be much benefited by passing some months of his life away from his native valley, and that an absence of a year or two would teach him to forget Marie, even if it did not teach Marie to forget him

And we must say a word or two about this friend At Vernet he was usually called M le Capitaine, though in fact he had never reached that rank He had been in the army, and having been wounded in the leg while still a sous lieutenant, had been pensioned, and had thus been interdicted from treading any further the thorny path that leads to glory For the last fifteen years he had resided under the roof of Madame Bauche, at first as a casual visitor, going and coming, but now for many years as constant there as she was herself

He was so constantly called Le Capitaine that his real name was seldom heard It may however as well be

known to us that this was Theodore Campan. He was a tall, well looking man, always dressed in black garments, of a coarse description certainly, but scrupulously clean and well brushed, of perhaps fifty years of age, and conspicuous for the rigid uprightness of his back—and for a black wooden leg.

This wooden leg was perhaps the most remarkable trait in his character. It was always jet black, being painted, or polished, or japanned, as occasion might require, by the hands of the capitaine himself. It was longer than ordinary wooden legs, as indeed the capitaine was longer than ordinary men, but nevertheless it never seemed in any way to impede the rigid punctilious propriety of his movements. It was never in his way as wooden legs usually are in the way of their wearers. And then to render it more illustrious it had round its middle, round the calf of the leg we may so say, a band of bright brass which shone like burnished gold.

It had been the capitaine's custom, now for some years past, to retire every evening at about seven o'clock into the sanctum sanctorum of Madame Bauche's habitation, the dark little private sitting-room in which she made out her bills and calculated her profits, and there regale himself in her presence—and indeed at her expense,—for the items never appeared in the bill, with coffee, and cognac. I have said that there was neither eating nor drinking at the establishment after the regular dinner hours, but in so saying I spoke of the world at large. Nothing further was allowed in the way of trade, but in the way of friendship so much was nowadays allowed to the capitaine.

It was at these moments that Madame Bauche discussed her private affairs, and asked for and received advice. For even Madame Bauche was mortal, nor could her green spectacles without other aid carry her through all the troubles of life. It was now five years since the world of Vernet discovered that La Mère Bauche was going to marry the capitaine, and for

eighteen months the world of Vernet had been full of this matter but any amount of patience is at last exhausted, and as no further steps in that direction were ever taken beyond the daily cup of coffee, that subject died away—very much unheeded by La Mere Bauche.

But she, though she thought of no matrimony for herself, thought much of matrimony for other people, and over most of those cups of evening coffee and cognac a matrimonial project was discussed in these latter days. It has been seen that the capitaine pleaded in Marie's favour when the fury of Madame Bauche's indignation broke forth, and that ultimately Marie was kept at home, and Adolphe sent away by his advice.

'But Adolphe cannot always stay away,' Madame Bauche had pleaded in her difficulty. The truth of this the capitaine had admitted, but Marie, he said, might be married to some one else before two years were over. And so the matter had commenced.

But to whom should she be married? To this question the capitaine had answered in perfect innocence of heart, that La Mere Bauche would be much better able to make such a choice than himself. He did not know how Marie might stand with regard to money. If madame would give some little 'dot,' the affair, the capitaine thought, would be more easily arranged.

All these things took months to say, during which period Marie went on with her work in melancholy listlessness. One comfort she had. Adolphe, before he went, had promised to her, holding in his hand as he did so a little cross which she had given him, that no earthly consideration should sever them,—that sooner or later he would certainly be her husband. Marie felt that her limbs could not work nor her tongue speak were it not for this one drop of water in her cup.

And then, deeply meditating, La Mère Bauche hit upon a plan, and herself communicated it to the capitaine over a second cup of coffee into which she poured a full teaspoonful more than the usual allowance of

cognac Why should not he, the capitaine himself, be the man to marry Marie Clavert ?

It was a very startling proposal, the idea of matrimony for himself never having as yet entered into the capitaine's head at any period of his life, but La Mere Bauche did contrive to make it not altogether unacceptable. As to that matter of dowry she was prepared to be more than generous. She did love Marie well, and could find it in her heart to give her anything—anything except her son, her own Adolphe. What she proposed was this. Adolphe, himself, would never keep the baths. If the capitaine would take Marie for his wife, Marie, Madame Bauche declared, should be the mistress after her death, subject of course to certain settlements as to Adolphe's pecuniary interests.

The plan was discussed a thousand times, and at last so far brought to bear that Marie was made acquainted with it—having been called in to sit in presence with La Mere Bauche and her future proposed husband. The poor girl manifested no disgust to the stiff ungainly lover whom they assigned to her,—who through his whole frame was in appearance almost as wooden as his own leg. On the whole, indeed, Marie liked the capitaine, and felt that he was her friend, and in her country such marriages were not uncommon. The capitaine was perhaps a little beyond the age at which a man might usually be thought justified in demanding the services of a young girl as his nurse and wife, but then Marie of herself had so little to give—except her youth, and beauty, and goodness.

But yet she could not absolutely consent, for was she not absolutely pledged to her own Adolphe? And therefore, when the great pecuniary advantages were, one by one, displayed before her, and when La Mere Bauche, as a last argument, informed her that as wife of the capitaine she would be regarded as a second mistress in the establishment and not as a servant,—she could only burst out into tears, and say that she did not know.



'I will be very kind to you,' said the capitaine, 'as kind as a man can be'

Marie took his hard withered hand and kissed it, and then looked up into his face with beseeching eyes which were not without avail upon his heart

'We will not press her now,' said the capitaine 'There is time enough'

But let his heart be touched ever so much, one thing was certain It could not be permitted that she should marry Adolphe To that view of the matter he had given in his unrestricted adhesion, nor could he by any means withdraw it without losing altogether his position in the establishment of Madame Bauche Nor indeed did his conscience tell him that such a marriage should be permitted That would be too much If every pretty girl were allowed to marry the first young man that might fall in love with her, what would the world come to?

And it soon appeared that there was not time enough—that the time was growing very scant In three months Adolphe would be back And if everything was not arranged by that time, matters might still go astray

And then Madame Bauche asked her final question 'You do not think, do you, that you can ever marry Adolphe?' And as she asked it the accustomed terror of her green spectacles magnified itself tenfold Marie could only answer by another burst of tears

The affair was at last settled among them Marie said that she would consent to marry the capitaine when she should hear from Adolphe's own mouth that he, Adolphe, loved her no longer She declared with many tears that her vows and pledges prevented her from promising more than this It was not her fault, at any rate not now, that she loved her lover It was not her fault,—not now at least—that she was bound by these pledges When she heard from his own mouth that he had discarded her, then she would marry the capitaine—or indeed sacrifice herself in any other way that La

Mère Bauche might desire    What would anything signify then ?

Madame Bauche's spectacles remained unmoved , but not her heart    Marie, she told the capitaine, should be equal to herself in the establishment, when once she was entitled to be called Madame Campan, and she should be to her quite as a daughter    She should have her cup of coffee every evening, and dine at the big table, and wear a silk gown at church, and the servants should all call her Madame , a great career should be open to her, if she would only give up her foolish girlish childish love for Adolphe    And all these great promises were repeated to Marie by the capitaine

But nevertheless there was but one thing in the whole world which in Marie's eyes was of any value , and that one thing was the heart of Adolphe Bauche    Without that she would be nothing, with that,—with that assured, she could wait patiently till doomsday

Letters were written to Adolphe during all these eventful doings , and a letter came from him saying that he greatly valued Marie's love, but that as it had been clearly proved to him that their marriage would be neither for her advantage, nor for his, he was willing to give it up    He consented to her marriage with the capitaine, and expressed his gratitude to his mother for the immediate pecuniary advantages which she had held out to him    Oh, Adolphe, Adolphe ! But, alas, alas ! is not such the way of most men's hearts—and of the hearts of some women ?

This letter was read to Marie, but it had no more effect upon her than would have had some dry legal document    In those days and in those places men and women did not depend much upon letters , nor when they were written, was there expressed in them much of heart or of feeling    Marie would understand, as she was well aware, the glance of Adolphe's eye and the tone of Adolphe's voice , she would perceive at once from them what her lover really meant, what he wished, what in

the innermost corner of his heart he really desired that she should do. But from that stiff constrained written document she could understand nothing.

It was agreed therefore that Adolphe should return, and that she would accept her fate from his mouth. The capitaine, who knew more of human nature than did poor Marie, felt tolerably sure of his bride. Adolphe, who had seen something of the world, would not care very much for the girl of his own valley. Money and pleasure, and some little position in the world would soon wean him from his love, and then Marie would accept her destiny—as other girls in the same position had done since the French world began.

And now it was the evening before Adolphe's expected arrival. La Mere Bauche was discussing the matter with the capitaine over the usual cup of coffee. Madame Bauche had of late become rather nervous on the matter, thinking that they had been somewhat rash in acceding so much to Marie. It seemed to her that it was absolutely now left to the two young lovers to say whether or no they would have each other or not. Now nothing on earth could be further from Madame Bauche's intention than this. Her decree and resolve was to heap down blessings on all persons concerned—provided always that she could have her own way, but, provided she did not have her own way, to heap down,—anything but blessings. She had her code of morality in this matter. She would do good if possible to everybody around her. But she would not on any score be induced to consent that Adolphe should marry Marie Clavert. Should that be in the wind she would rid the house of Marie, of the capitaine, and even of Adolphe himself.

She had become therefore somewhat querulous, and self opinionated in her discussions with her friend.

'I don't know,' she said on the evening in question, 'I don't know. It may be all right, but if Adolphe turns against me, what are we to do then?'

'Mere Bauche,' said the capitaine, sipping his coffee

and puffing out the smoke of his cigar, 'Adolphe will not turn against us' It had been somewhat remarked by many that the capitaine was more at home in the house, and somewhat freer in his manner of talking with Madame Bauche, since this matrimonial alliance had been on the tapis than he had ever been before La Mere herself observed it, and did not quite like it, but how could she prevent it now? When the capitaine was once married she would make him know his place, in spite of all her promises to Marie

'But if he says he likes the girl?' continued Madame Bauche

'My friend, you may be sure that he will say nothing of the kind He has not been away two years without seeing girls as pretty as Marie And then you have his letter'

'That is nothing, capitaine, he would eat his letter as quick as you would eat an omelet *aux fines herbes*' Now the capitaine was especially quick over an omelet *aux fines herbes*

'And, Mere Bauche, you also have the purse, he will know that he cannot eat that, except with your good will'

'Ah!' exclaimed Madame Bauche, 'poor lad' He has not a sous in the world unless I give it to him' But it did not seem that this reflection was in itself displeasing to her

'Adolphe will now be a man of the world,' continued the capitaine 'He will know that it does not do to throw away everything for a pair of red lips That is the folly of a boy, and Adolphe will be no longer a boy Believe me, Mere Bauche, things will be right enough'

'And then we shall have Marie sick and ill and half dying on our hands,' said Madame Bauche

This was not flattering to the capitaine, and so he felt it 'Perhaps so, perhaps not,' he said 'But at any rate she will get over it It is a malady which rarely kills young women—especially when another alliance awaits them'

'Bah!' said Madame Bauche, and in saying that word she avenged herself for the too great liberty which the capitaine had lately taken. He shrugged his shoulders, took a pinch of snuff, and uninvited helped himself to a teaspoonful of cognac. Then the conference ended, and on the next morning before breakfast Adolphe Bauche arrived.

On that morning poor Marie hardly knew how to bear herself. A month or two back, and even up to the last day or two, she had felt a sort of confidence that Adolphe would be true to her, but the nearer came that fatal day the less strong was the confidence of the poor girl. She knew that those two long headed, aged counsellors were plotting against her happiness, and she felt that she could hardly dare hope for success with such terrible foes opposed to her. On the evening before the day Madame Bauche had met her in the passages, and kissed her as she wished her good night. Marie knew little about sacrifices, but she felt that it was a sacrificial kiss.

In those days a sort of diligence with the mails for Olette passed through Prades early in the morning, and a conveyance was sent from Vernet to bring Adolphe to the baths. Never was prince or princess expected with more anxiety. Madame Bauche was up and dressed long before the hour, and was heard to say five several times that she was sure he would not come. The capitaine was out and on the high road, moving about with his wooden leg, as perpendicular as a lamp post and almost as black. Marie also was up, but nobody had seen her. She was up and had been out about the place before any of them were stirring, but now that the world was on the move she lay hidden like a hare in its form.

And then the old *char à banc* clattered up to the door, and Adolphe jumped out of it into his mother's arms. He was fatter and fairer than she had last seen him, had a larger beard, was more fashionably clothed,

and certainly looked more like a man. Marie also saw him out of her little window, and she thought that he looked like a god. Was it probable, she said to herself, that one so godlike would still care for her?

The mother was delighted with her son, who rattled away quite at his ease. He shook hands very cordially with the capitaine—of whose intended alliance with his own sweetheart he had been informed, and then as he entered the house with his hand under his mother's arm, he asked one question about her. 'And where is Marie?' said he. 'Marie' oh upstairs, you shall see her after breakfast,' said La Mère Bauche. And so they entered the house, and went in to breakfast among the guests. Everybody had heard something of the story, and they were all on the alert to see the young man whose love or want of love was considered to be of so much importance.

'You will see that it will be all right,' said the capitaine, carrying his head very high.

'I think so, I think so,' said La Mère Bauche, who, now that the capitaine was right, no longer desired to contradict him.

'I know that it will be all right,' said the capitaine. 'I told you that Adolphe would return a man, and he is a man. Look at him, he does not care this for Marie Clavert', and the capitaine, with much eloquence in his motion, pitched over a neighbouring wall a small stone which he held in his hand.

And then they all went to breakfast with many signs of outward joy. And not without some inward joy, for Madame Bauche thought she saw that her son was cured of his love. In the mean time Marie sat up stairs still afraid to show herself.

'He has come,' said a young girl, a servant in the house, running up to the door of Marie's room.

'Yes,' said Marie, 'I could see that he has come.'

'And, oh, how beautiful he is!' said the girl, putting her hands together and looking up to the ceiling. Marie

in her heart of hearts wished that he was not half so beautiful, as then her chance of having him might be greater

'And the company are all talking to him as though he were the prefect,' said the girl

'Never mind who is talking to him,' said Marie, 'go away, and leave me—you are wanted for your work' Why before this was he not talking to her? Why not, if he were really true to her? Alas, it began to fall upon her mind that he would be false! And what then? What should she do then? She sat still gloomily, thinking of that other spouse that had been promised to her

As speedily after breakfast as was possible Adolphe was invited to a conference in his mother's private room. She had much debated in her own mind whether the capitaine should be invited to this conference or no. For many reasons she would have wished to exclude him. She did not like to teach her son that she was unable to manage her own affairs, and she would have been well pleased to make the capitaine understand that his assistance was not absolutely necessary to her. But then she had an inward fear that her green spectacles would not now be as efficacious on Adolphe, as they had once been, in old days, before he had seen the world and become a man. It might be necessary that her son, being a man, should be opposed by a man. So the capitaine was invited to the conference.

What took place there need not be described at length. The three were closeted for two hours, at the end of which time they came forth together. The countenance of Madame Bauche was serene and comfortable, her hopes of ultimate success ran higher than ever. The face of the capitaine was masked, as are always the faces of great diplomatists, he walked placid and upright, raising his wooden leg with an ease and skill that was absolutely marvellous. But poor Adolphe's brow was clouded. Yes, poor Adolphe! for he was poor in spirit. He had pledged himself to give up Marie,

and to accept the liberal allowance which his mother tendered him, but it remained for him now to communicate these tidings to Marie herself

'Could not you tell her?' He had said to his mother, with very little of that manliness in his face on which his mother now so prided herself. But La Mere Bauche explained to him that it was a part of the general agreement that Marie was to hear his decision from his own mouth

'But you need not regard it,' said the capitaine, with the most indifferent air in the world. 'The girl expects it. Only she has some childish idea that she is bound till you yourself release her. I don't think she will be troublesome.' Adolphe at that moment did feel that he should have liked to kick the capitaine out of his mother's house

And where should the meeting take place? In the hall of the bath house, suggested Madame Bauche, because, as she observed, they could walk round and round and nobody ever went there at that time of day. But to this Adolphe objected, it would be so cold and dismal and melancholy

The capitaine thought that Mere Bauche's little parlour was the place, but La Mere herself did not like this. They might be overheard, as she well knew, and she guessed that the meeting would not conclude without some sobs that would certainly be bitter and might perhaps be loud

'Send her up to the grotto, and I will follow her,' said Adolphe. On this therefore they agreed. Now the grotto was a natural excavation in a high rock, which stood precipitously upright over the establishment of the baths. A steep zigzag path with almost never ending steps had been made along the face of the rock from a little flower garden attached to the house which lay immediately under the mountain. Close along the front of the hotel ran a little brawling river, leaving barely room for a road between it and the door, over



this there was a wooden bridge leading to the garden, and some two or three hundred yards from the bridge began the steps by which the ascent was made to the grotto

When the season was full and the weather perfectly warm the place was much frequented. There was a green table in it, and four or five deal chairs, a green garden seat also was there, which however had been removed into the innermost back corner of the excavation, as its hinder legs were somewhat at fault. A wall about two feet high ran along the face of it, guarding its occupants from the precipice. In fact it was no grotto, but a little chasm in the rock, such as we often see up above our heads in rocky valleys, and which by means of these steep steps had been turned into a source of exercise and amusement for the visitors at the hotel.

Standing at the wall one could look down into the garden, and down also upon the shining slate roof of Madame Bauche's house, and to the left might be seen the sombre silent snow capped top of stern old Camigou, king of mountains among those Eastern Pyrenees.

And so Madame Bauche undertook to send Marie up to the grotto, and Adolphe undertook to follow her thither. It was now spring, and though the winds had fallen and the snow was no longer lying on the lower peaks, still the air was fresh and cold, and there was no danger that any of the few guests at the establishment would visit the place.

'Make her put on her cloak, Mère Bauche,' said the capitaine, who did not wish that his bride should have a cold in her head on their wedding-day. La Mère Bauche pushed and pshawed, as though she were not minded to pay any attention to recommendations on such subjects from the capitaine. But nevertheless when Marie was seen slowly to creep across the little bridge about fifteen minutes after this time, she had a handkerchief on her head, and was closely wrapped in a dark brown cloak.

Poor Marie herself little heeded the cold fresh air, but

she was glad to avail herself of any means by which she might hide her face. When Madame Bauche sought her out in her own little room, and with a smiling face and kind kiss bade her go to the grotto, she knew, or fancied that she knew that it was all over.

'He will tell you all the truth—how it all is,' said La Mere. 'We will do all we can, you know, to make you happy, Marie. But you must remember what Monsieur le Curé told us the other day. In this vale of tears we cannot have everything, as we shall have some day, when our poor wicked souls have been purged of all their wickedness. Now go, dear, and take your cloak.'

'Yes, maman.'

'And Adolphe will come to you. And try and behave well, like a sensible girl.'

'Yes, maman,'—and so she went, bearing on her brow another sacrificial kiss—and bearing in her heart such an unutterable load of woe!

Adolphe had gone out of the house before her, but standing in the stable yard, well within the gate so that she should not see him, he watched her slowly crossing the bridge and mounting the first flight of the steps. He had often seen her tripping up those stairs, and had, almost as often, followed her with his quicker feet. And she, when she would hear him, would run, and then he would catch her breathless at the top, and steal kisses from her when all power of refusing them had been robbed from her by her efforts at escape. There was no such running now, no such following, no thought of such kisses.

As for him, he would fain have skulked off and shirked the interview had he dared. But he did not dare, so he waited there, out of heart, for some ten minutes, speaking a word now and then to the bath-man, who was standing by, just to show that he was at his ease. But the bath man knew that he was not at his ease. Such would-be lies as those rarely achieve deception,—are rarely believed. And then, at the end of the

ten minutes, with steps as slow as Marie's had been, he also ascended to the grotto

Marie had watched him from the top, but so that she herself should not be seen. He however had not once lifted up his head to look for her, but, with eyes turned to the ground had plodded his way up to the cave. When he entered she was standing in the middle, with her eyes downcast, and her hands clasped before her. She had retired some way from the wall, so that no eyes might possibly see her but those of her false lover. There she stood when he entered, striving to stand motionless, but trembling like a leaf in every limb.

It was only when he reached the top step that he made up his mind how he would behave. Perhaps after all, the capitaine was right, perhaps she would not mind it.

'Marie,' said he, with a voice that attempted to be cheerful, 'this is an odd place to meet in after such a long absence,' and he held out his hand to her. But only his hand! He offered her no salute. He did not even kiss her cheek as a brother would have done! Of the rules of the outside world it must be remembered that poor Marie knew but little. He had been a brother to her, before he had become her lover.

But Marie took his hand saying, 'Yes, it has been very long.'

'And now that I have come back,' he went on to say, 'it seems that we are all in a confusion together. I never knew such a piece of work. However, it is all for the best, I suppose.'

'Perhaps so,' said Marie still trembling violently, and still looking down upon the ground. And then there was silence between them for a minute or so.

'I tell you what it is, Marie,' said Adolphe at last, dropping her hand and making a great effort to get through the work before him. 'I am afraid we two have been very foolish. Don't you think we have now? It seems quite clear that we can never get ourselves married. Don't you see it in that light?'

Marie's head turned round and round with her, but she was not of the fainting order. She took three steps backwards and leant against the wall of the cave. She also was trying to think how she might best fight her battle. Was there no chance for her? Could no eloquence, no love prevail? On her own beauty she counted but little, but might not prayers do something, and a reference to those old vows which had been so frequent, so eager, so solemnly pledged between them?

'Never get ourselves married!' she said, repeating his words 'Never, Adolphe? Can we never be married?'

'Upon my word, my dear girl, I fear not. You see my mother is so dead against it.'

'But we could wait, could we not?'

'Ah, but that's just it Marie. We cannot wait. We must decide now,—to day. You see I can do nothing without money from her—and as for you, you see she won't even let you stay in the house unless you marry old Campan at once. He's a very good sort of fellow though, old as he is. And if you do marry him, why you see you'll stay here, and have it all your own way in everything. As for me, I shall come and see you all from time to time, and shall be able to push my way as I ought to do.'

'Then, Adolphe, you wish me to marry the capitaine?'

'Upon my honour I think it is the best thing you can do, I do indeed.'

'Oh, Adolphe!'

'What can I do for you, you know? Suppose I was to go down to my mother and tell her that I had decided to keep you myself, what would come of it? Look at it in that light, Marie.'

'She could not turn you out—you her own son!'

'But she would turn you out, and deuced quick, too. I can assure you of that, I can, upon my honour.'

'I should not care that,' and she made a motion with

her hand to show how indifferent she would be to such treatment as regarded herself 'Not that—, if I still had the promise of your love'

'But what would you do?'

'I would work There are other houses besides that one,' and she pointed to the slate roof of the Bauche establishment

'And for me—I should not have a penny in the world,' said the young man

She came up to him and took his right hand between both of hers and pressed it warmly, oh, so warmly

'You would have my love,' said she, 'my deepest, warmest, best heart's love I should want nothing more, nothing on earth, if I could still have yours' And she leaned against his shoulder and looked with all her eyes into his face

'But, Marie, that's nonsense, you know'

'No, Adolphe, it is not nonsense Do not let them teach you so What does love mean, if it does not mean that? Oh, Adolphe, you do love me, you do love me, you do love me?'

'Yes,—I love you,' he said slowly,—as though he would not have said it, if he could have helped it And then his arm crept slowly round her waist, as though in that also he could not help himself

'And do not I love you?' said the passionate girl 'Oh I do, so dearly, with all my heart, with all my soul Adolphe, I so love you, that I cannot give you up Have I not sworn to be yours, sworn, sworn a thousand times? How can I marry that man! Oh Adolphe, how can you wish that I should marry him?' And she clung to him, and looked at him, and besought him with her eyes

'I shouldn't wish it,—only—' and then he paused It was hard to tell her that he was willing to sacrifice her to the old man because he wanted money from his mother

'Only what' But, Adolphe, do not wish it at all! Have you not sworn that I should be your wife? Look

here, look at this , ' and she brought out from her bosom a little charm that he had given her in return for that cross ' Did you not kiss that when you swore before the figure of the virgin that I should be your wife ? And do you not remember that I feared to swear too, because your mother was so angry , and then you made me ? After that, Adolphe ! Oh, Adolphe ! Tell me that I may have some hope I will wait , oh, I will wait so patiently '

He turned himself away from her and walked backwards and forwards uneasily through the grotto He did love her ,—love her as such men do love sweet, pretty girls The warmth of her hand, the affection of her touch, the pure bright passion of her tear-laden eye had reawakened what power of love there was within him But what was he to do ? Even if he were willing to give up the immediate golden hopes which his mother held out to him, how was he to begin, and then how carry out this work of self devotion ? Marie would be turned away, and he would be left a victim in the hands of his mother, and of that stiff, wooden legged militaire , —a penniless victim, left to mope about the place without a grain of influence or a morsel of pleasure

' But what can we do ? ' he exclaimed again, as he once more met Marie's searching eye

' We can be true and honest, and we can wait,' she said, coming close up to him and taking hold of his arm ' I do not fear it , and she is not my mother, Adolphe You need not fear your own mother '

' Fear , no, of course I don't fear But I don't see how the very devil we can manage it '

' Will you let me tell her that I will not marry the capitaine , that I will not give up your promises , and then I am ready to leave the house ? '

' It would do no good '

' It would do every good, Adolphe, if I had your promised word once more , if I could hear from your own voice one more tone of love Do you not remember

this place ? It was here that you forced me to say that I loved you It is here also that you will tell me that I have been deceived '

'It is not I that would deceive you,' he said 'I wonder that you should be so hard upon me God knows that I have trouble enough '

'Well, if I am a trouble to you, be it so Be it as you wish,' and she leaned back against the wall of the rock, and crossing her arms upon her breast looked away from him and fixed her eyes upon the sharp granite peaks of Canigou

He again betook himself to walk backwards and forwards through the cave He had quite enough of love for her to make him wish to marry her, quite enough, now, at this moment, to make the idea of her marriage with the capitaine very distasteful to him, enough probably to make him become a decently good husband to her, should fate enable him to marry her, but not enough to enable him to support all the punishment which would be the sure effects of his mother's displeasure Besides, he had promised his mother that he would give up Marie,—had entirely given in his adhesion to that plan of the marriage with the capitaine He had owned that the path of life as marked out for him by his mother was the one which it behoved him, as a man, to follow It was this view of his duties as a man which had been specially urged on him with all the capitaine's eloquence And old Campan had entirely succeeded It is so easy to get the assent of such young men, so weak in mind and so weak in pocket, when the arguments are backed by a promise of two thousand francs a year

'I'll tell you what I'll do,' at last he said 'I'll get my mother by herself, and will ask her to let the matter remain as it is for the present '

'Not if it be a trouble, M Adolphe, ' and the proud girl still held her hands upon her bosom, and still looked towards the mountain

'You know what I mean, Marie You can understand how she and the capitaine are worrying me'

'But tell me, Adolphe, do you love me?'

'You know I love you, only—'

'And you will not give me up?'

'I will ask my mother I will try and make her yield'

Marie could not feel that she received much confidence from her lover's promise, but still, even that, weak and unsteady as it was, even that was better than absolute fixed rejection So she thanked him, promised him with tears in her eyes that she would always, always be faithful to him, and then bade him go down to the house She would follow, she said, as soon as his passing had ceased to be observed

Then she looked at him as though she expected some sign of renewed love But no such sign was vouchsafed to her Now that she thirsted for the touch of his lip upon her cheek, it was denied to her He did as she bade him, he went down, slowly loitering, by himself, and in about half an hour she followed him and unobserved crept to her chamber

Again we will pass over what took place between the mother and the son, but late in that evening, after the guests had gone to bed, Marie received a message, desiring her to wait on Madame Bauche in a small salon which looked out from one end of the house It was intended as a private sitting room should any special stranger arrive who required such accommodation, and therefore was but seldom used Here she found La Mere Bauche sitting in an arm chair behind a small table on which stood two candles, and on a sofa against the wall sat Adolphe The capitaine was not in the room

'Shut the door, Marie, and come in and sit down,' said Madame Bauche It was easy to understand from the tone of her voice that she was angry and stern, in an unbending mood, and resolved to carry out to the very



letter all the threats conveyed by those terrible spectacles

Marie did as she was bid. She closed the door and sat down on the chair that was nearest to her.

'Marie,' said La Mere Bauche—and the voice sounded fierce in the poor girl's ears, and an angry fire glimmered through the green glasses—'what is all this about that I hear? Do you dare to say that you hold my son bound to marry you?' And then the august mother paused for an answer.

But Marie had no answer to give. She looked suppliantly towards her lover, as though beseeching him to carry on the fight for her. But if she could not do battle for herself, certainly he could not do it for her. What little amount of fighting he had had in him, had been thoroughly vanquished before her arrival.

'I will have an answer, and that immediately,' said Madame Bauche. 'I am not going to be betrayed into ignominy and disgrace by the object of my own charity. Who picked you out of the gutter, miss, and brought you up and fed you, when you would otherwise have gone to the foundling? And is this your gratitude for it all? You are not satisfied with being fed and clothed and cherished by me, but you must rob me of my son! Know this then, Adolphe shall never marry a child of charity such as you are.'

Marie sat still, stunned by the harshness of these words. La Mere Bauche had often scolded her, indeed, she was given to much scolding, but she had scolded her as a mother may scold a child. And when this story of Marie's love first reached her ears, she had been very angry, but her anger had never brought her to such a pass as this. Indeed, Marie had not hitherto been taught to look at the matter in this light. No one had heretofore twitted her with eating the bread of charity. It had not occurred to her that on this account she was unfit to be Adolphe's wife. There, in that valley, they were all so nearly equal, that no idea of

her own inferiority had ever pressed itself upon her mind But now—!

When the voice ceased she again looked at him, but it was no longer with a beseeching look Did he also altogether scorn her? That was now the inquiry which her eyes were called upon to make No, she could not say that he did It seemed to her that his energies were chiefly occupied in pulling to pieces the tassel of the sofa cushion

‘And now, miss, let me know at once whether this nonsense is to be over or not,’ continued La Mere Bauche, ‘and I will tell you at once, I am not going to maintain you here, in my house, to plot against our welfare and happiness As Marie Clavert you shall not stay here Capitaine Campan is willing to marry you, and as his wife I will keep my word to you, though you little deserve it If you refuse to marry him, you must go As to my son, he is there, and he will tell you now, in my presence, that he altogether declines the honour you propose for him’

And then she ceased, waiting for an answer, drumming the table with a wafer stamp which happened to be ready to her hand, but Marie said nothing Adolphe had been appealed to, but Adolphe had not yet spoken

‘Well, miss?’ said La Mere Bauche

Then Marie rose from her seat, and walking round she touched Adolphe lightly on the shoulder ‘Adolphe,’ she said, ‘it is for you to speak now I will do as you bid me’

He gave a long sigh, looked first at Marie and then at his mother, shook himself slightly, and then spoke ‘Upon my word, Marie, I think mother is right It would never do for us to marry, it would not indeed’

‘Then it is decided,’ said Marie, returning to her chair

‘And you will marry the capitaine?’ said La Mere Bauche

Marie merely bowed her head in token of acquiescence

'Then we are friends again. Come here, Marie, and kiss me. You must know that it is my duty to take care of my own son. But I don't want to be angry with you if I can help it, I don't indeed. When once you are Madame Campan, you shall be my own child, and you shall have any room in the house you like to choose—there!' And she once more imprinted a kiss on Marie's cold forehead.

How they all got out of the room, and off to their own chambers, I can hardly tell. But in five minutes from the time of this last kiss they were divided. La Mere Bauche had patted Marie, and smiled on her, and called her her dear good little Madame Campan, her young little mistress of the Hôtel Bauche, and had then got herself into her own room, satisfied with her own victory.

Nor must my readers be too severe on Madame Bauche. She had already done much for Marie Clavert, and when she found herself once more by her own bedside, she prayed to be forgiven for the cruelty which she felt that she had shown to the orphan. But in making this prayer, with her favourite crucifix in her hand and the little image of the Virgin before her, she pleaded her duty to her son. Was it not right, she asked the Virgin, that she should save her son from a bad marriage? And then she promised ever so much of recompense, both to the Virgin and to Marie, a new trousseau for each, with candles to the Virgin, with a gold watch and chain for Marie, as soon as she should be Marie Campan. She had been cruel, she acknowledged it. But at such a crisis was it not defensible? And then the recompense should be so full!

But there was one other meeting that night, very short indeed, but not the less significant. Not long after they had all separated, just so long as to allow of the house being quiet, Adolphe, still sitting in his room,

meditating on what the day had done for him, heard a low tap at his door 'Come in,' he said, as men always do say, and Marie opening the door, stood just within the verge of his chamber. She had on her countenance neither the soft look of entreating love which she had worn up there in the grotto, nor did she appear crushed and subdued as she had done before his mother. She carried her head somewhat more erect than usual, and looked boldly out at him from under her soft eyelashes. There might still be love there, but it was love proudly resolving to quell itself. Adolphe as he looked at her, felt that he was afraid of her.

'It is all over then between us, M. Adolphe?' she said.

'Well, yes. Don't you think it had better be so, eh, Marie?'

'And this is the meaning of oaths and vows, sworn to each other so sacredly?'

'But, Marie, you heard what my mother said.'

'Oh, sir! I have not come to ask you again to love me. Oh, no! I am not thinking of that. But this, this would be a lie if I kept it now, it would choke me if I wore it as that man's wife. Take it back,' and she tendered to him the little charm which she had always worn round her neck since he had given it to her. He took it abstractedly, without thinking what he did, and placed it on his dressing table.

'And you,' she continued, 'can you still keep that cross? Oh, no! you must give me back that. It would remind you too often of vows that were untrue.'

'Marie,' he said, 'do not be so harsh to me.'

'Harsh!' said she, 'no, there has been enough of harshness. I would not be harsh to you, Adolphe. But give me the cross, it would prove a curse to you if you kept it.'

He then opened a little box which stood upon the table, and taking out the cross gave it to her.

'And now good bye,' she said. 'We shall have but

little more to say to each other I know this now, that I was wrong ever to have loved you I should have been to you as one of the other poor girls in the house But, oh ! how was I to help it ?' To this he made no answer, and she, closing the door softly, went back to her chamber And thus ended the first day of Adolphe Bauche's return to his own house

On the next morning the capitaine and Marie were formally betrothed This was done with some little ceremony, in the presence of all the guests who were staying at the establishment, and with all manner of gracious acknowledgements of Marie's virtues It seemed as though La Mère Bauche could not be courteous enough to her There was no more talk of her being a child of charity, no more allusion now to the gutter La Mère Bauche with her own hand brought her cake with a glass of wine after her betrothal was over, and patted her on the cheek, and called her her dear little Marie Campan And then the capitaine was made up of infinite politeness, and the guests all wished her joy, and the servants of the house began to perceive that she was a person entitled to respect How different was all this from that harsh attack that was made on her the preceding evening ! Only Adolphe,—he alone kept aloof Though he was present there he said nothing He, and he only, offered no congratulations

In the midst of all these gala doings Marie herself said little or nothing La Mere Bauche perceived this, but she forgave it Angrily as she had expressed herself at the idea of Marie's daring to love her son, she had still acknowledged within her own heart that such love had been natural She could feel no pity for Marie as long as Adolphe was in danger, but now she knew how to pity her So Marie was still petted and still encouraged, though she went through the day's work sullenly and in silence

As to the capitaine it was all one to him He was a man of the world He did not expect that he should

really be preferred, *con amore*, to a young fellow like Adolphe. But he did expect that Marie, like other girls, would do as she was bid, and that in a few days she would regain her temper and be reconciled to her life.

And then the marriage was fixed for a very early day, for as La Mere said, 'What was the use of waiting? All their minds were made up now, and therefore the sooner the two were married the better. Did not the capitaine think so?'

The capitaine said that he did think so.

And then Marie was asked. It was all one to her, she said. Whatever Maman Bauche liked, that she would do, only she would not name a day herself. Indeed she would neither do nor say anything herself which tended in any way to a furtherance of these matrimonials. But then she acquiesced, quietly enough if not readily, in what other people did and said, and so the marriage was fixed for the day week after Adolphe's return.

The whole of that week passed much in the same way. The servants about the place spoke among themselves of Marie's perverseness, obstinacy, and ingratitude, because she would not look pleased, or answer Madame Bauche's courtesies with gratitude, but La Mere herself showed no signs of anger. Marie had yielded to her, and she required no more. And she remembered also the harsh words she had used to gain her purpose, and she reflected on all that Marie had lost. On these accounts she was forbearing and exacted nothing—nothing but that one sacrifice which was to be made in accordance to her wishes.

And it was made. They were married in the great salon, the dining room, immediately after breakfast. Madame Bauche was dressed in a new puce silk dress and looked very magnificent on the occasion. She simpered and smiled, and looked gay even in spite of her spectacles, and as the ceremony was being performed, she

held fast clutched in her hand the gold watch and chain which were intended for Marie as soon as ever the marriage should be completed

The capitaine was dressed exactly as usual, only that all his clothes were new \* Madame Bauche had endeavoured to persuade him to wear a blue coat, but he answered that such a change would not, he was sure, be to Marie's taste To tell the truth, Marie would hardly have known the difference had he presented himself in scarlet vestments

Adolphe, however, was dressed very finely, but he did not make himself prominent on the occasion Marie watched him closely, though none saw that she did so, and of his garments she could have given an account with much accuracy—of his garments, ay' and of every look 'Is he a man,' she said at last to herself, 'that he can stand by and see all this?'

She too was dressed in silk They had put on her what they pleased, and she bore the burden of her wedding finery without complaint and without pride There was no blush on her face as she walked up to the table at which the priest stood, nor hesitation in her low voice as she made the necessary answers She put her hand into that of the capitaine when required to do so, and when the ring was put on her finger she shuddered, but ever so slightly No one observed it but La Mere Bauche 'In one week she will be used to it, and then we shall all be happy,' said La Mère to herself 'And I,—I will be so kind to her!'

And so the marriage was completed, and the watch was at once given to Marie 'Thank you, maman,' said she, as the trinket was fastened to her girdle Had it been a pincushion that had cost three sous, it would have affected her as much

And then there was cake, and wine, and sweetmeats, and after a few minutes Marie disappeared For an hour or so the capitaine was taken up with the congratulations of his friends, and with the efforts necessary

to the wearing of his new honours with an air of ease, but after that time he began to be uneasy because his wife did not come to him. At two or three in the afternoon he went to La Mere Bauche to complain. 'This lackadaisical nonsense is no good,' he said. 'At any rate it is too late now. Marie had better come down among us and show herself satisfied with her husband.'

But Madame Bauche took Marie's part. 'You must not be too hard on Marie,' she said. 'She has gone through a good deal this week past, and is very young, whereas, capitaine, you are not very young.'

The capitaine merely shrugged his shoulders. In the mean time Mère Bauche went up to visit her protégé in her own room, and came down with a report that she was suffering from a headache. She could not appear at dinner, Madame Bauche said, but would make one at the little party which was to be given in the evening. With this the capitaine was forced to be content.

The dinner therefore went on quietly without her, much as it did on other ordinary days. And then there was a little time of vacancy, during which the gentlemen drank their coffee and smoked their cigars at the café, talking over the event that had taken place that morning, and the ladies brushed their hair and added some ribbon or some brooch to their usual apparel. Twice during this time did Madame Bauche go up to Marie's room with offers to assist her. 'Not yet, maman, not quite yet,' said Marie piteously through her tears, and then twice did the green spectacles leave the room, covering eyes which also were not dry. Ah! what had she done? What had she dared to take upon herself to do? She could not undo it now.

And then it became quite dark in the passages and out of doors, and the guests assembled in the salon. La Mere came in and out three or four times, uneasy in her gait and unpleasant in her aspect, and everybody began to see that things were wrong. 'She is ill, I am



afraid,' said one 'The excitement has been too much,' said a second, 'and he is so old,' whispered a third And the capitaine stalked about erect on his wooden leg, taking snuff, and striving to look indifferent, but he also was uneasy in his mind

Presently La Mere came in again, with a quicker step than before, and whispered something, first to Adolphe and then to the capitaine, whereupon they both followed her out of the room

'Not in her chamber?' said Adolphe

'Then she must be in yours,' said the capitaine

'She is in neither,' said La Mere Bauche, with her sternest voice, 'nor is she in the house'

And now there was no longer an affectation of indifference on the part of any of them They were anything but indifferent The capitaine was eager in his demands that the matter should still be kept secret from the guests She had always been romantic, he said, and had now gone out to walk by the river side They three and the old bath man would go out and look for her

'But it is pitch dark,' said La Mere Bauche

'We will take lanterns,' said the capitaine And so they sallied forth with creeping steps over the gravel, so that they might not be heard by those within, and proceeded to search for the young wife

'Marie! Marie!' said La Mère Bauche, in piteous accents, 'do come to me, pray do!'

'Hush!' said the capitaine 'They'll hear you if you call' He could not endure that the world should learn that a marriage with him had been so distasteful to Marie Clavert

'Marie, dear Marie!' called Madame Bauche, louder than before, quite regardless of the capitaine's feelings, but no Marie answered In her innermost heart now did La Mere Bauche wish that this cruel marriage had been left undone

Adolphe was foremost with his lamp, but he hardly

dared to look in the spot where he felt that it was most likely that she should have taken refuge. How could he meet her again, alone, in that grotto? Yet he alone of the four was young. It was clearly for him to ascend. 'Marie!' he shouted, 'are you there?' as he slowly began the long ascent of the steps.

But he had hardly begun to mount when a whirring sound struck his ear, and he felt that the air near him was moved, and then there was a crash upon the lower platform of rock, and a moan, repeated twice but so faintly, and a rustle of silk, and a slight struggle somewhere as he knew within twenty paces of him, and then all was again quiet and still in the night air.

'What was that?' asked the capitaine in a harsh voice. He made his way half across the little garden, and he also was within forty or fifty yards of the flat rock. But Adolphe was unable to answer him. He had fainted and the lamp had fallen from his hands, and rolled to the bottom of the steps.

But the capitaine, though even his heart was all but quenched within him, had still strength enough to make his way up to the rock, and there, holding the lantern above his eyes, he saw all that was left for him to see of his bride.

As for La Mere Bauche, she never again sat at the head of that table—never again dictated to guests—never again laid down laws for the management of any one. A poor bedridden old woman, she lay there in her house at Vernet for some seven tedious years, and then was gathered to her fathers.

As for the capitaine—but what matters? He was made of sterner stuff. What matters either the fate of such a one as Adolphe Bauche?

# HERMAN MELVILLE

## BARTLEBY

[From *The Piazza Tales* 1856]

I AM a rather elderly man. The nature of my avocations, for the last thirty years, has brought me into more than ordinary contact with what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom, as yet, nothing, that I know of, has ever been written—I mean, the law copyists, or scriveners. I have known very many of them, professionally and privately, and, if I pleased, could relate divers histories, at which good natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep. But I waive the biographies of all other scriveners, for a few passages in the life of Bartleby, who was a scrivener, the strangest I ever saw, or heard of. While, of other law copyists, I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done. I believe that no materials exist, for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and, in his case, those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, *that* is all I know of him, except, indeed, one vague report, which will appear in the sequel.

Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it is fit I make some mention of myself, my employés, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings, because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented. Imprimis I am a man who, from his youth upward, has been filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best. Hence, though I belong to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous, even to turbulence, at

times, yet nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause, but, in the cool tranquillity of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds, and mortgages, and title deeds All who know me, consider me an eminently *safe* man The late John Jacob Astor, a personage little given to poetic enthusiasm, had no hesitation in pronouncing my first grand point to be prudence, my next, method I do not speak it in vanity, but simply record the fact, that I was not unemployed in my profession by the late John Jacob Astor, a name which, I admit, I love to repeat, for it hath a rounded and orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion I will freely add, that I was not insensible to the late John Jacob Astor's good opinion

Some time prior to the period at which this little history begins, my avocations had been largely increased The good old office, now extinct in the State of New York, of a Master in Chancery, had been conferred upon me It was not a very arduous office, but very pleasantly remunerative I seldom lose my temper, much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages, but, I must be permitted to be rash here, and declare, that I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master in Chancery, by the new Constitution, as a—premature act, inasmuch as I had counted upon a life lease of the profits, whereas I only received those of a few short years But this is by the way

My chambers were upstairs, at No — Wall Street At one end, they looked upon the white wall of the interior of a spacious skylight shaft, penetrating the building from top to bottom

This view might have been considered rather tame than otherwise, deficient in what landscape painters call 'life' But, if so, the view from the other end of my

chambers offered, at least, a contrast, if nothing more. In that direction, my windows commanded an unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade, which wall required no spy glass to bring out its lurking beauties, but, for the benefit of all near sighted spectators, was pushed up to within ten feet of my window panes. Owing to the great height of the surrounding buildings, and my chambers being on the second floor, the interval between this wall and mine not a little resembled a huge square cistern.

At the period just preceding the advent of *Bartleby*, I had two persons as copyists in my employment, and a promising lad as an office-boy. First, Turkey, second, Nippers, third, Ginger Nut. These may seem names, the like of which are not usually found in the Directory. In truth, they were nicknames, mutually conferred upon each other by my three clerks, and were deemed expressive of their respective persons or characters. Turkey was a short, pursy Englishman, of about my own age—that is, somewhere not far from sixty. In the morning, one might say, his face was of a fine florid hue, but after twelve o'clock, meridian—his dinner hour—it blazed like a grate full of Christmas coals, and continued blazing—but, as it were, with a gradual wane—till six o'clock, p m, or thereabouts, after which, I saw no more of the proprietor of the face, which, gaining its meridian with the sun, seemed to set with it, to rise, culminate, and decline the following day, with the like regularity and undiminished glory. There are many singular coincidences I have known in the course of my life, not the least among which was the fact, that, exactly when Turkey displayed his fullest beams from his red and radiant countenance, just then, too, at that critical moment, began the daily period when I considered his business capacities as seriously disturbed for the remainder of the twenty four hours. Not that he was absolutely idle, or averse to business, then, far from it. The difficulty was, he was apt to be altogether

too energetic There was a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness of activity about him He would be incautious in dipping his pen into his inkstand All his blots upon my documents were dropped there after twelve o'clock, meridian Indeed, not only would he be reckless, and sadly given to making blots in the afternoon, but, some days, he went further, and was rather noisy At such times, too, his face flamed with augmented blazonry, as if cannel coal had been heaped on anthracite He made an unpleasant racket with his chair, spilled his sand box, in mending his pens, impatiently split them all to pieces, and threw them on the floor in a sudden passion, stood up, and leaned over his table, boxing his papers about in a most indecorous manner, very sad to behold in an elderly man like him Nevertheless, as he was in many ways a most valuable person to me, and all the time before twelve o'clock, meridian, was the quickest, steadiest creature, too, accomplishing a great deal of work in a style not easily to be matched—for these reasons, I was willing to overlook his eccentricities, though, indeed, occasionally, I remonstrated with him I did this very gently, however, because, though the civilest, nay, the blandest and most reverential of men in the morning, yet, in the afternoon, he was disposed, upon provocation, to be slightly rash with his tongue—in fact, insolent Now, valuing his morning services as I did, and resolved not to lose them—yet, at the same time, made uncomfortable by his inflamed ways after twelve o'clock—and being a man of peace, unwilling by my admonitions to call forth unseemly retorts from him, I took upon me, one Saturday noon (he was always worse on Saturdays) to hint to him, very kindly, that, perhaps, now that he was growing old, it might be well to abridge his labours, in short, he need not come to my chambers after twelve o'clock, but, dinner over, had best go home to his lodgings, and rest himself till tea-time But no, he insisted upon his afternoon devo-

tions His countenance became intolerably fervid, as he oratorically assured me—gesticulating with a long ruler at the other end of the room—that if his services in the morning were useful, how indispensable, then, in the afternoon ?

‘ With submission, sir,’ said Turkey, on this occasion, ‘ I consider myself your right hand man In the morning I but marshal and deploy my columns, but in the afternoon I put myself at their head, and gallantly charge the foe, thus ’—and he made a violent thrust with the ruler

‘ But the blots, Turkey,’ intimated I

‘ True, but, with submission, sir, behold these hairs I am getting old Surely, sir, a blot or two of a warm afternoon is not to be severely urged against grey hairs Old age—even if it blot the page—is honourable With submission, sir, we *both* are getting old ’

This appeal to my fellow feeling was hardly to be resisted At all events, I saw that go he would not So, I made up my mind to let him stay, resolving, nevertheless, to see to it that, during the afternoon, he had to do with my less important papers

Nippers, the second on my list, was a whiskered, sallow, and, upon the whole, rather piratical looking young man, of about five and twenty I always deemed him the victim of two evil powers—ambition and indigestion The ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents The indigestion seemed betokened in an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing the teeth to audibly grind together over mistakes committed in copying, unnecessary maledictions, hissed, rather than spoken, in the heat of business, and especially by a continual discontent with the height of the table where he worked Though of a very ingenious mechanical turn, Nippers could never get this table to suit him.

He put chips under it, blocks of various sorts, bits of pasteboard, and at last went so far as to attempt an exquisite adjustment, by final pieces of folded blotting-paper. But no invention would answer. If, for the sake of easing his back, he brought the table lid at a sharp angle well up toward his chin, and wrote there like a man using the steep roof of a Dutch house for his desk, then he declared that it stopped the circulation in his arms. If now he lowered the table to his waistbands, and stooped over it in writing, then there was a sore aching in his back. In short, the truth of the matter was, Nippers knew not what he wanted. Or, if he wanted anything, it was to be rid of a scrivener's table altogether. Among the manifestations of his diseased ambition was a fondness he had for receiving visits from certain ambiguous looking fellows in seedy coats, whom he called his clients. Indeed, I was aware that not only was he, at times, considerable of a ward-politician, but he occasionally did a little business at the Justices' courts, and was not unknown on the steps of the Tombs. I have good reason to believe, however, that one individual who called upon him at my chambers, and who, with a grand air, he insisted was his client, was no other than a dun, and the alleged title deed, a bill. But, with all his failings, and the annoyances he caused me, Nippers, like his compatriot Turkey, was a very useful man to me, wrote a neat, swift hand, and, when he chose, was not deficient in a gentlemanly sort of deportment. Added to this, he always dressed in a gentlemanly sort of way, and so, incidentally, reflected credit upon my chambers. Whereas, with respect to Turkey, I had much ado to keep him from being a reproach to me. His clothes were apt to look oily, and smell of eating houses. He wore his pantaloons very loose and baggy in summer. His coats were execrable, his hat not to be handled. But while the hat was a thing of indifference to me, inasmuch as his natural civility and deference as a



dependent Englishman, always led him to doff it the moment he entered the room, yet his coat was another matter. Concerning his coats, I reasoned with him, but with no effect. The truth was, I suppose, that a man with so small an income could not afford to sport such a lustrous face and a lustrous coat at one and the same time. As Nippers once observed, Turkey's money went chiefly for red ink. One winter day, I presented Turkey with a highly respectable looking coat of my own—a padded grey coat, of a most comfortable warmth, and which buttoned straight up from the knee to the neck. I thought Turkey would appreciate the favour, and abate his rashness and obstreperousness of afternoons. But no, I verily believe that buttoning himself up in so downy and blanket like a coat had a pernicious effect upon him—upon the same principle that too much oats are bad for horses. In fact, precisely as a rash, restive horse is said to feel his oats, so Turkey felt his coat. It made him insolent. He was a man whom prosperity harmed.

Though, concerning the self-indulgent habits of Turkey, I had my own private surmises, yet, touching Nippers, I was well persuaded that, whatever might be his faults in other respects, he was, at least, a temperate young man. But, indeed, nature herself seemed to have been his vintner, and, at his birth, charged him so thoroughly with an irritable, brandy-like disposition, that all subsequent potations were needless. When I consider how, amid the stillness of my chambers, Nippers would sometimes impatiently rise from his seat, and stooping over his table, spread his arms wide apart, seize the whole desk, and move it, and jerk it, with a grim, grinding motion on the floor, as if the table were a perverse voluntary agent, intent on thwarting and vexing him, I plainly perceive that, for Nippers, brandy and water were altogether superfluous.

It was fortunate for me that, owing to its peculiar cause—indigestion—the irritability and consequent

nervousness of Nippers were mainly observable in the morning, while in the afternoon he was comparatively mild. So that, Turkey's paroxysms only coming on about twelve o'clock, I never had to do with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieved each other, like guards. When Nippers's was on, Turkey's was off, and vice versa. This was a good natural arrangement, under the circumstances.

Ginger Nut, the third on my list, was a lad, some twelve years old. His father was a carman, ambitious of seeing his son on the bench instead of a cart, before he died. So he sent him to my office, as student at law, errand boy, cleaner and sweeper, at the rate of one dollar a week. He had a little desk to himself, but he did not use it much. Upon inspection, the drawer exhibited a great array of the shells of various sorts of nuts. Indeed, to this quick-witted youth, the whole noble science of the law was contained in a nut-shell. Not the least among the employments of Ginger Nut, as well as one which he discharged with the most alacrity, was his duty as cake and apple purveyor for Turkey and Nippers. Copying law papers being proverbially a dry, husky sort of business, my two scrivener-fellows were fain to moisten their mouths very often with Spitzenbergs, to be had at the numerous stalls nigh the Custom House and Post Office. Also, they sent Ginger Nut very frequently for that peculiar cake—small, flat, round, and very spicy—after which he had been named by them. Of a cold morning, when business was but dull, Turkey would gobble up scores of these cakes, as if they were mere wafers—indeed, they sell them at the rate of six or eight for a penny—the scrape of his pen blending with the crunching of the crisp particles in his mouth. Of all the fiery afternoon blunders and flurried rashnesses of Turkey, was his once moistening a ginger-cake between his lips, and clapping it on to a mortgage, for a seal. I came within an ace of dismissing him—then. But he mollified me by making an oriental bow, and

saying—' With submission, sir, it was generous of me to find you in stationery on my own account '

Now my original business—that of a conveyancer and title hunter, and drawer up of recondite documents of all sorts—was considerably increased by receiving the master's office There was now great work for scriveners Not only must I push the clerks already with me, but I must have additional help

In answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man one morning stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer I can see that figure now—pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn! It was Bartleby

After a few words touching his qualifications, I engaged him, glad to have among my corps of copyists a man of so singularly sedate an aspect, which I thought might operate beneficially upon the flighty temper of Turkey, and the fiery one of Nippers

I should have stated before that ground glass folding-doors divided my premises into two parts, one of which was occupied by my scriveners, the other by myself According to my humour, I threw open these doors, or closed them I resolved to assign Bartleby a corner by the folding-doors, but on my side of them, so as to have this quiet man within easy call, in case any trifling thing was to be done I placed his desk close up to a small side window in that part of the room, a window which originally had afforded a lateral view of certain grimy back yards and bricks, but which, owing to subsequent erections, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light Within three feet of the panes was a wall, and the light came down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome Still further to a satisfactory arrangement, I procured a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined

At first, Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun light and by candle light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically.

It is, of course, an indispensable part of a scrivener's business to verify the accuracy of his copy, word by word. Where there are two or more scribes in an office, they assist each other in this examination, one reading from the copy, the other holding the original. It is a very dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair. I can readily imagine that, to some sanguine temperaments, it would be altogether intolerable. For example, I cannot credit that the mettlesome poet, Byron, would have contentedly sat down with Bartleby to examine a law document of, say, five hundred pages, closely written in a crumpled hand.

Now and then, in the haste of business, it had been my habit to assist in comparing some brief document myself, calling Turkey or Nippers for this purpose. One object I had, in placing Bartleby so handy to me behind the screen, was, to avail myself of his services on such trivial occasions. It was on the third day, I think, of his being with me, and before any necessity had arisen for having his own writing examined, that, being much hurried to complete a small affair I had in hand, I abruptly called to Bartleby. In my haste and natural expectancy of instant compliance, I sat with my head bent over the original on my desk, and my right hand sideways, and somewhat nervously extended with the copy, so that, immediately upon emerging from his retreat, Bartleby might snatch it and proceed to business without the least delay.

In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do—

namely, to examine a small paper with me. Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when, without moving from his privacy, Bartleby, in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, 'I would prefer not to.'

I sat a while in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me, or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood my meaning. I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume, but in quite as clear a one came the previous reply, 'I would prefer not to.'

'Prefer not to,' echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the room with a stride. 'What do you mean? Are you moon struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here—take it,' and I thrust it toward him.

'I would prefer not to,' said he.

I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed, his grey eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience, or impertinence in his manner, in other words, had there been anything ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-Paris bust of Cicero out of doors. I stood gazing at him a while, as he went on with his own writing, and then reseated myself at my desk. This is very strange, thought I. What had one best do? But my business hurried me. I concluded to forget the matter for the present, reserving it for my future leisure. So calling Nippers from the other room, the paper was speedily examined.

A few days after this, Bartleby concluded four lengthy documents, being quadruplicates of a week's testimony taken before me in my High Court of Chancery. It became necessary to examine them. It was an important suit, and great accuracy was imperative. Having all things arranged, I called Turkey,

Nippers, and Ginger Nut from the next room, meaning to place the four copies in the hands of my four clerks, while I should read from the original. Accordingly, Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut had taken their seats in a row, each with his document in his hand, when I called to Bartleby to join this interesting group.

'Bartleby' quick, I am waiting'

I heard a slow scrape of his chair legs on the uncarpeted floor, and soon he appeared standing at the entrance of his hermitage.

'What is wanted?' said he mildly.

'The copies, the copies,' said I hurriedly. 'We are going to examine them. There'—and I held towards him the fourth quadruplicate.

'I would prefer not to,' he said, and gently disappeared behind the screen.

For a few moments I was turned into a pillar of salt, standing at the head of my seated column of clerks. Recovering myself, I advanced towards the screen, and demanded the reason for such extraordinary conduct.

'Why do you refuse?'

'I would prefer not to.'

With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but, in a wonderful manner, touched and disconcerted me. I began to reason with him.

'These are your own copies we are about to examine. It is labour saving to you, because one examination will answer for your four papers. It is common usage. Every copyist is bound to help examine his copy. Is it not so? Will you not speak?' Answer!'

'I prefer not to,' he replied in a flute-like tone. It seemed to me that, while I had been addressing him, he carefully revolved every statement that I made, fully comprehended the meaning, could not gainsay the irresistible conclusion, but, at the same time, some

paramount consideration prevailed with him to reply as he did

'You are decided, then, not to comply with my request—a request made according to common usage and common sense?'

He briefly gave me to understand, that on that point my judgement was sound. Yes, his decision was irreversible.

It is not seldom the case that, when a man is browbeaten in some unprecedented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith. He begins, as it were, vaguely to surmise that, wonderful as it may be, all the justice and all the reason is on the other side. Accordingly, if any disinterested persons are present, he turns to them for some reinforcement for his own faltering mind.

'Turkey,' said I, 'what do you think of this? Am I not right?'

'With submission, sir,' said Turkey, in his blandest tone, 'I think that you are.'

'Nippers,' said I, 'what do *you* think of it?'

'I think I should kick him out of the office.'

(The reader, of nice perceptions, will here perceive that, it being morning, Turkey's answer is couched in polite and tranquil terms, but Nippers's replies in ill-tempered ones. Or, to repeat a previous sentence, Nippers's ugly mood was on duty, and Turkey's off.)

'Ginger Nut,' said I, willing to enlist the smallest suffrage in my behalf, 'what do *you* think of it?'

'I think, sir, he's a little *lunny*,' replied Ginger Nut, with a grin.

'You hear what they say,' said I, turning towards the screen, 'come forth and do your duty.'

But he vouchsafed no reply. I pondered a moment in sore perplexity. But once more business hurried me. I determined again to postpone the consideration of this dilemma to my future leisure. With a little trouble we made out to examine the papers without Bartleby,

though at every page or two Turkey deferentially dropped his opinion, that this proceeding was quite out of the common, while Nippers, twitching in his chair with a dyspeptic nervousness, ground out, between his set teeth, occasional hissing maledictions against the stubborn oaf behind the screen. And for his (Nippers's) part, this was the first and the last time he would do another man's business without pay.

Meanwhile Bartleby sat in his hermitage, oblivious to everything but his own peculiar business there.

Some days passed, the scrivener being employed upon another lengthy work. His late remarkable conduct led me to regard his ways narrowly. I observed that he never went to dinner, indeed, that he never went anywhere. As yet I had never, of my personal knowledge, known him to be outside of my office. He was a perpetual sentry in the corner. At about eleven o'clock though, in the morning, I noticed that Ginger Nut would advance towards the opening in Bartleby's screen, as if silently beckoned thither by a gesture invisible to me where I sat. The boy would then leave the office, jingling a few pence, and reappear with a handful of ginger nuts, which he delivered in the hermitage, receiving two of the cakes for his trouble.

He lives, then, on ginger nuts, thought I, never eats a dinner, properly speaking, he must be a vegetarian, then, but no, he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger nuts. My mind then ran on in reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts. Ginger nuts are so called, because they contain ginger as one of their peculiar constituents, and the final flavouring one. Now, what was ginger? A hot, spicy thing. Was Bartleby hot and spicy? Not at all. Ginger, then, had no effect upon Bartleby. Probably he preferred it should have none.

Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance. If the individual so resisted be of a not



inhumane temper, and the resisting one perfectly harmless in his passivity, then, in the better moods of the former, he will endeavour charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgement. Even so, for the most part, I regarded Bartleby and his ways. 'Poor fellow' thought I, he means no mischief, it is plain he intends no insolence, his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me. I can get along with him. If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve. Yes. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self approval. To befriend Bartleby, to humour him in his strange wilfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. But this mood was not invariable with me. The passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me. I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition—to elicit some angry spark from him answerable to my own. But, indeed, I might as well have essayed to strike fire with my knuckles against a bit of Windsor soap. But one afternoon the evil impulse in me mastered me, and the following little scene ensued.

'Bartleby,' said I, 'when those papers are all copied, I will compare them with you.'

'I would prefer not to.'

'How? Surely you do not mean to persist in that mulish vagary?'

No answer.

I threw open the folding doors near by, and, turning upon Turkey and Nippers, exclaimed

'Bartleby a second time says, he won't examine his papers. What do you think of it, Turkey?'

It was afternoon, be it remembered. Turkey sat glowing like a brass boiler, his bald head steaming, his hands reeling among his blotted papers.

'Think of it?' roared Turkey, 'I think I'll just step behind his screen, and black his eyes for him!'

So saying, Turkey rose to his feet and threw his arms into a pugilistic position. He was hurrying away to make good his promise, when I detained him, alarmed at the effect of incautiously rousing Turkey's combativeness after dinner.

'Sit down, Turkey,' said I, 'and hear what Nippers has to say. What do you think of it, Nippers? Would I not be justified in immediately dismissing Bartleby?'

'Excuse me, that is for you to decide, sir. I think his conduct quite unusual, and, indeed, unjust, as regards Turkey and myself. But it may only be a passing whim.'

'Ah,' exclaimed I, 'you have strangely changed your mind, then—you speak very gently of him now.'

'All beer,' cried Turkey, 'gentleness is effects of beer—Nippers and I dined together to day. You see how gentle I am, sir. Shall I go and black his eyes?'

'You refer to Bartleby, I suppose. No, not to day, Turkey,' I replied, 'pray, put up your fists.'

I closed the doors, and again advanced towards Bartleby. I felt additional incentives tempting me to my fate. I burned to be rebelled against again. I remembered that Bartleby never left the office.

'Bartleby,' said I, 'Ginger Nut is away, just step around to the Post Office, won't you? (it was but a three minutes' walk), and see if there is anything for me.'

'I would prefer not to.'

'You *will* not?'

'I *prefer* not.'

I staggered to my desk, and sat there in a deep study. My blind inveteracy returned. Was there any other thing in which I could procure myself to be ignominiously repulsed by this lean, penniless wight?—my hired clerk? What added thing is there, perfectly reasonable, that he will be sure to refuse to do?

'Bartleby!'

No answer

'Bartleby,' in a louder tone

No answer

'Bartleby,' I roared

Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons, he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage

'Go to the next room, and tell Nippers to come to me'

'I prefer not to,' he respectfully and slowly said, and mildly disappeared

'Very good, Bartleby,' said I, in a quiet sort of serenely severe self possessed tone, intimating the unalterable purpose of some terrible retribution very close at hand. At the moment I half intended something of the kind. But upon the whole, as it was drawing towards my dinner-hour, I thought it best to put on my hat and walk home for the day, suffering much from perplexity and distress of mind.

Shall I acknowledge it? The conclusion of this whole business was, that it soon became a fixed fact of my chambers, that a pale young scrivener, by the name of Bartleby, had a desk there, that he copied for me at the usual rate of four cents a folio (one hundred words), but he was permanently exempt from examining the work done by him, that duty being transferred to Turkey and Nippers, out of compliment, doubtless, to their superior acuteness, moreover, said Bartleby was never, on any account, to be dispatched on the most trivial errand of any sort, and that even if entreated to take upon him such a matter, it was generally understood that he would 'prefer not to'—in other words, that he would refuse point blank.

As days passed on, I became considerably reconciled to Bartleby. His steadiness, his freedom from all dissipation, his incessant industry (except when he chose to throw himself into a standing reverie behind his screen),

his great stillness, his unalterableness of demeanour under all circumstances, made him a valuable acquisition. One prime thing was this—he *was always there*—first in the morning, continually through the day, and the last at night. I had a singular confidence in his honesty. I felt my most precious papers perfectly safe in his hands. Sometimes, to be sure, I could not, for the very soul of me, avoid falling into sudden spasmodic passions with him. For it was exceeding difficult to bear in mind all the time those strange peculiarities, privileges, and unheard of exemptions, forming the tacit stipulations on Bartleby's part under which he remained in my office. Now and then, in the eagerness of dispatching pressing business, I would inadvertently summon Bartleby, in a short, rapid tone, to put his finger, say, on the incipient tie of a bit of red tape with which I was about compressing some papers. Of course, from behind the screen the usual answer, 'I prefer not to,' was sure to come, and then, how could a human creature, with the common infirmities of our nature, refrain from bitterly exclaiming upon such perverseness—such unreasonableness. However, every added repulse of this sort which I received only tended to lessen the probability of my repeating the inadvertence.

Here it must be said, that according to the custom of most legal gentlemen occupying chambers in densely populated law buildings, there were several keys to my door. One was kept by a woman residing in the attic, which person weekly scrubbed and daily swept and dusted my apartments. Another was kept by Turkey for convenience sake. The third I sometimes carried in my own pocket. The fourth I knew not who had.

Now, one Sunday morning I happened to go to Trinity Church, to hear a celebrated preacher, and finding myself rather early on the ground I thought I would walk round to my chambers for a while. Luckily I had my key with me, but upon applying it to the lock, I found it resisted by something inserted from the

inside Quite surprised, I called out, when to my consternation a key was turned from within, and thrusting his lean visage at me, and holding the door ajar, the apparition of Bartleby appeared, in his shirt-sleeves, and otherwise in a strangely tattered dishabille, saying quietly that he was sorry, but he was deeply engaged just then, and—preferred not admitting me at present In a brief word or two, he moreover added, that perhaps I had better walk round the block two or three times, and by that time he would probably have concluded his affairs

Now, the utterly unsurmised appearance of Bartleby, tenanting my law chambers of a Sunday morning, with his cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance, yet withal firm and self possessed, had such a strange effect upon me, that incontinently I slunk away from my own door, and did as desired But not without sundry twinges of impotent rebellion against the mild effrontery of this unaccountable scrivener Indeed, it was his wonderful mildness chiefly, which not only disarmed me, but unmanned me as it were For I consider that one, for the time, is a sort of unmanned when he tranquilly permits his hired clerk to dictate to him, and order him away from his own premises Furthermore, I was full of uneasiness as to what Bartleby could possibly be doing in my office in his shirt sleeves, and in an otherwise dismantled condition of a Sunday morning Was anything amiss going on? Nay, that was out of the question It was not to be thought of for a moment that Bartleby was an immoral person But what could he be doing there?—copying? Nay again, whatever might be his eccentricities, Bartleby was an eminently decorous person He would be the last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity Besides, it was Sunday, and there was something about Bartleby that forbade the supposition that he would by any secular occupation violate the proprieties of the day

Nevertheless, my mind was not pacified, and full of a restless curiosity, at last I returned to the door. With out hindrance I inserted my key, opened it, and entered. Bartleby was not to be seen. I looked round anxiously, peeped behind his screen, but it was very plain that he was gone. Upon more closely examining the place, I surmised that for an indefinite period Bartleby must have ate, dressed, and slept in my office, and that, too, without plate, mirror, or bed. The cushioned seat of a rickety old sofa in one corner bore the faint impress of a lean, reclining form. Rolled away under his desk, I found a blanket, under the empty grate a blacking box and brush, on a chair, a tin basin, with soap and a ragged towel, in a newspaper a few crumbs of ginger nuts and a morsel of cheese. Yes, thought I, it is evident enough that Bartleby has been making his home here, keeping bachelor's hall all by himself. Immediately then the thought came sweeping across me, what miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great, but his solitude, how horrible! Think of it. Of a Sunday, Wall Street is deserted as Petra, and every night of every day it is an emptiness. This building, too, which of week days hums with industry and life, at nightfall echoes with sheer vacancy, and all through Sunday is forlorn. And here Bartleby makes his home, sole spectator of a solitude which he has seen all-populous—a sort of innocent and transformed Marius brooding among the ruins of Carthage!

For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not displeasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam. I remembered the bright silks and sparkling faces I had seen that day, in gala trim, swan like sailing down the Mississippi of Broad way, and I contrasted them with the pallid copyist

and thought to myself, Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay, but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none. These sad fancyings—chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain—led on to other and more special thoughts, concerning the eccentricities of Bartleby. Presentiments of strange discoveries hovered round me. The scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding sheet.

Suddenly I was attracted by Bartleby's closed desk, the key in open sight left in the lock.

I mean no mischief, seek the gratification of no heartless curiosity, thought I, besides, the desk is mine, and its contents, too, so I will make bold to look within. Everything was methodically arranged, the papers smoothly placed. The pigeon-holes were deep, and removing the files of documents, I groped into their recesses. Presently I felt something there, and dragged it out. It was an old bandanna handkerchief, heavy and knotted. I opened it, and saw it was a savings-bank.

I now recalled all the quiet mysteries which I had noted in the man. I remembered that he never spoke but to answer, that, though at intervals he had considerable time to himself, yet I had never seen him reading—no, not even a newspaper, that for long periods he would stand looking out, at his pale window behind the screen, upon the dead brick wall, I was quite sure he never visited any refectory or eating house, while his pale face clearly indicated that he never drank beer like Turkey, or tea and coffee even, like other men, that he never went anywhere in particular that I could learn, never went out for a walk, unless, indeed, that was the case at present, that he had declined telling who he was, or whence he came, or whether he had any relatives in the world, that though so thin and pale, he never complained of ill health. And more than all, I remembered a certain

unconscious air of pallid—how shall I call it?—of pallid haughtiness, say, or rather an austere reserve about him, which had positively awed me into my tame compliance with his eccentricities, when I had feared to ask him to do the slightest incidental thing for me, even though I might know, from his long continued motionlessness, that behind his screen he must be standing in one of those dead wall reveries of his

Revolving all these things, and coupling them with the recently discovered fact, that he made my office his constant abiding place and home, and not forgetful of his morbid moodiness, revolving all these things, a prudential feeling began to steal over me. My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity, but just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew to my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion. So true it is, and so terrible, too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections, but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill. To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succour, common sense bids the soul be rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body, but his body did not pain him, it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach.

I did not accomplish the purpose of going to Trinity Church that morning. Somehow, the things I had seen disqualified me for the time from church going. I walked homeward, thinking what I would do with Bartleby. Finally, I resolved upon this—I would put certain calm questions to him the next morning, touch-



ing his history, &c , and if he declined to answer them openly and unreservedly (and I supposed he would prefer not), then to give him a twenty dollar bill over and above whatever I might owe him, and tell him his services were no longer required , but that if in any other way I could assist him, I would be happy to do so, especially if he desired to return to his native place, wherever that might be, I would willingly help to defray the expenses. Moreover, if, after reaching home, he found himself at any time in want of aid, a letter from him would be sure of a reply

The next morning came

'Bartleby,' said I, gently calling to him behind his screen

No reply

'Bartleby,' said I, in a still gentler tone, 'come here, I am not going to ask you to do anything you would prefer not to do—I simply wish to speak to you'

Upon this he noiselessly slid into view

'Will you tell me, Bartleby, where you were born?'

'I would prefer not to'

'Will you tell me *anything* about yourself?'

'I would prefer not to'

'But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me? I feel friendly toward you'

He did not look at me while I spoke, but kept his glance fixed upon my bust of Cicero, which, as I then sat, was directly behind me, some six inches above my head

'What is your answer, Bartleby?'

said I, after waiting a considerable time for a reply, during which his countenance remained immovable, only there was the faintest conceivable tremor of the white attenuated mouth

'At present I prefer to give no answer,' he said, and retired into his hermitage

It was rather weak in me, I confess, but his manner, on this occasion, nettled me. Not only did there seem to lurk in it a certain calm disdain, but his perverseness

seemed ungrateful, considering the undeniable good usage and indulgence he had received from me

Again I sat ruminating what I should do. Mortified as I was at his behaviour, and resolved as I had been to dismiss him when I entered my office, nevertheless I strangely felt something superstitious knocking at my heart, and forbidding me to carry out my purpose, and denouncing me for a villain if I dared to breathe one bitter word against this forlornest of mankind. At last, familiarly drawing my chair behind his screen, I sat down and said 'Bartleby, never mind, then, about revealing your history, but let me entreat you, as a friend, to comply as far as may be with the usages of this office. Say now, you will help to examine papers to-morrow or next day—in short, say now, that in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable—say so, Bartleby.'

'At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable,' was his mildly cadaverous reply.

Just then the folding doors opened, and Nippers approached. He seemed suffering from an unusually bad night's rest, induced by severer indigestion than common. He overheard those final words of Bartleby.

'*Prefer not, eh?*' gritted Nippers—'*I'd prefer him, if I were you, sir,*' addressing me—'*I'd prefer him, I'd give him preferences, the stubborn mule!*' What is it, sir, pray, that he *prefers* not to do now?'

Bartleby moved not a limb.

'Mr Nippers,' said I, '*I'd prefer that you would withdraw for the present.*'

Somehow, of late, I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word '*prefer*' upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions. And I trembled to think that my contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. And what further and deeper aberration might it not yet produce? This apprehension had not been without efficacy in determining me to summary measures.

As Nippers, looking very sour and sulky, was departing, Turkey blandly and deferentially approached

'With submission, sir,' said he, 'yesterday I was thinking about Bartleby here, and I think that if he would but prefer to take a quart of good ale every day, it would do much towards mending him, and enabling him to assist in examining his papers'

'So you have got the word too,' said I, slightly excited

'With submission, what word, sir,' asked Turkey, respectfully crowding himself into the contracted space behind the screen, and by so doing, making me jostle the scrivener 'What word, sir?'

'I would prefer to be left alone here,' said Bartleby, as if offended at being mobbed in his privacy

'That's the word, Turkey,' said I—'that's it'

'Oh, *prefer*? oh yes—queer word I never use it myself But, sir, as I was saying, if he would but prefer——'

'Turkey,' interrupted I, 'you will please withdraw'

'Oh certainly, sir, if you prefer that I should'

As he opened the folding door to retire, Nippers at his desk caught a glimpse of me, and asked whether I would prefer to have a certain paper copied on blue paper or white He did not in the least roguishly accent the word *prefer* It was plain that it involuntarily rolled from his tongue I thought to myself, surely I must get rid of a demented man, who already has in some degree turned the tongues, if not the heads of myself and clerks But I thought it prudent not to break the dismissal at once

The next day I noticed that Bartleby did nothing but stand at his window in his dead wall reverie Upon asking him why he did not write, he said that he had decided upon doing no more writing

'Why, how now? what next?' exclaimed I, 'do no more writing?'

'No more'

'And what is the reason?'

'Do you not see the reason for yourself?' he in differently replied

I looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occurred to me, that his unexampled diligence in copying by his dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me might have temporarily impaired his vision.

I was touched. I said something in condolence with him. I hinted that of course he did wisely in abstaining from writing for a while, and urged him to embrace that opportunity of taking wholesome exercise in the open air. This, however, he did not do. A few days after this, my other clerks being absent, and being in a great hurry to dispatch certain letters by the mail, I thought that having nothing else earthly to do, Bartleby would surely be less inflexible than usual, and carry these letters to the Post Office. But he blankly declined. So, much to my inconvenience, I went myself.

Still added days went by. Whether Bartleby's eyes improved or not, I could not say. To all appearance, I thought they did. But when I asked him if they did, he vouchsafed no answer. At all events, he would do no copying. At last, in reply to my urgings, he informed me that he had permanently given up copying.

'What!' exclaimed I, 'suppose your eyes should get entirely well—better than ever before—would you not copy then?'

'I have given up copying,' he answered, and slid aside.

He remained as ever, a fixture in my chamber. Nay—if that were possible—he became still more of a fixture than before. What was to be done? He would do nothing in the office, why should he stay there? In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear. Yet I was sorry for him. I speak less than truth when I say that, on his own account, he occasioned me uneasiness.

ness If he would but have named a single relative or friend, I would instantly have written, and urged their taking the poor fellow away to some convenient retreat But he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe A bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic At length, necessities connected with my business tyrannized over all other considerations. Decently as I could, I told Bartleby that in six days' time he must unconditionally leave the office I warned him to take measures, in the interval, for procuring some other abode I offered to assist him in this endeavour, if he himself would but take the first step towards a removal 'And when you finally quit me, Bartleby,' added I, 'I shall see that you go not away entirely unprovided Six days from this hour, remember'

At the expiration of that period, I peeped behind the screen, and lo! Bartleby was there

I buttoned up my coat, balanced myself, advanced slowly towards him, touched his shoulder, and said, 'The time has come, you must quit this place, I am sorry for you, here is money, but you must go'

'I would prefer not,' he replied, with his back still towards me

'You *must*'

He remained silent

Now I had an unbounded confidence in this man's common honesty He had frequently restored to me sixpences and shillings carelessly dropped upon the floor, for I am apt to be very reckless in such shirt-button affairs The proceeding, then, which followed will not be deemed extraordinary

'Bartleby,' said I, 'I owe you twelve dollars on account, here are thirty two, the odd twenty are yours—Will you take it?' and I handed the bills towards him

But he made no motion

'I will leave them here, then,' putting them under a weight on the table. Then taking my hat and cane and

going to the door, I tranquilly turned and added—  
'After you have removed your things from these offices, Bartleby, you will of course lock the door—since every one is now gone for the day but you—and if you please, slip your key underneath the mat, so that I may have it in the morning I shall not see you again, so good bye to you If, hereafter, in your new place of abode, I can be of any service to you, do not fail to advise me by letter Good bye, Bartleby, and fare you well'

But he answered not a word, like the last column of some ruined temple, he remained standing mute and solitary in the middle of the otherwise deserted room

As I walked home in a pensive mood, my vanity got the better of my pity I could not but highly plume myself on my masterly management in getting rid of Bartleby Masterly I call it, and such it must appear to any dispassionate thinker The beauty of my procedure seemed to consist in its perfect quietness There was no vulgar bullying, no bravado of any sort, no choleric hectoring, and striding to and fro across the apartment, jerking out vehement commands for Bartleby to bundle himself off with his beggarly traps Nothing of the kind Without loudly bidding Bartleby depart—as an inferior genius might have done—I *assumed* the ground that depart he must, and upon that assumption built all I had to say The more I thought over my procedure, the more I was charmed with it Nevertheless, next morning, upon awakening, I had my doubts—I had somehow slept off the fumes of vanity One of the coolest and wisest hours a man has, is just after he awakes in the morning My procedure seemed as sagacious as ever—but only in theory How it would prove in practice—there was the rub It was truly a beautiful thought to have assumed Bartleby's departure, but, after all, that assumption was simply my own, and none of Bartleby's The great point was, not whether I had assumed that he would

quit me, but whether he would prefer so to do. He was more a man of preferences than assumptions.

After breakfast, I walked down town, arguing the probabilities *pro* and *con*. One moment I thought it would prove a miserable failure, and Bartleby would be found all alive at my office as usual, the next moment it seemed certain that I should find his chair empty. And so I kept veering about. At the corner of Broadway and Canal Street, I saw quite an excited group of people standing in earnest conversation.

'I'll take odds he doesn't,' said a voice as I passed.

'Doesn't go?—done!' said I. 'put up your money.'

I was instinctively putting my hand in my pocket to produce my own, when I remembered that this was an election day. The words I had overheard bore no reference to Bartleby, but to the success or non-success of some candidate for the mayoralty. In my intent frame of mind, I had, as it were, imagined that all Broadway shared in my excitement, and were debating the same question with me. I passed on, very thankful that the uproar of the street screened my momentary absent mindedness.

As I had intended, I was earlier than usual at my office door. I stood listening for a moment. All was still. He must be gone. I tried the knob. The door was locked. Yes, my procedure had worked to a charm, he indeed must be vanished. Yet a certain melancholy mixed with this. I was almost sorry for my brilliant success. I was fumbling under the door-mat for the key, which Bartleby was to have left there for me, when accidentally my knee knocked against a panel, producing a summoning sound, and in response a voice came to me from within—'Not yet, I am occupied.'

It was Bartleby.

I was thunderstruck. For an instant I stood like the man who, pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless after-

noon long ago in Virginia, by summer lightning, at his own warm open window he was killed, and remained leaning out there upon the dreamy afternoon, till some one touched him, when he fell

'Not gone!' I murmured at last. But again obeying that wondrous ascendancy which the inscrutable scrivener had over me, and from which ascendancy, for all my chafing, I could not completely escape, I slowly went downstairs and out into the street, and while walking round the block, considered what I should next do in this unheard of perplexity. Turn the man out by an actual thrusting I could not, to drive him away by calling him hard names would not do, calling in the police was an unpleasant idea, and yet, permit him to enjoy his cadaverous triumph over me—this, too, I could not think of. What was to be done? or, if nothing could be done, was there anything further that I could *assume* in the matter? Yes, as before I had prospectively assumed that Bartleby would depart, so now I might retrospectively assume that departed he was. In the legitimate carrying out of this assumption, I might enter my office in a great hurry, and pretending not to see Bartleby at all, walk straight against him as if he were air. Such a proceeding would in a singular degree have the appearance of a home thrust. It was hardly possible that Bartleby could withstand such an application of the doctrine of assumptions. But upon second thoughts the success of the plan seemed rather dubious. I resolved to argue the matter over with him again.

'Bartleby,' said I, entering the office, with a quietly severe expression, 'I am seriously displeased. I am pained, Bartleby. I had thought better of you. I had imagined you of such a gentlemanly organization, that in any delicate dilemma a slight hint would suffice—in short, an assumption. But it appears I am deceived. Why,' I added, unaffectedly starting, 'you have not even touched that money yet,' pointing to it, just where I had left it the evening previous.



He answered nothing

'Will you, or will you not, quit me?' I now demanded in a sudden passion, advancing close to him

'I would prefer *not* to quit you,' he replied, gently emphasizing the *not*

'What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?'

He answered nothing

'Are you ready to go on and write now? Are your eyes recovered? Could you copy a small paper for me this morning? or help examine a few lines? or step round to the Post Office? In a word, will you do anything at all, to give a colouring to your refusal to depart the premises?'

He silently retired into his hermitage

I was now in such a state of nervous resentment that I thought it but prudent to check myself at present from further demonstrations. Bartleby and I were alone. I remembered the tragedy of the unfortunate Adams and the still more unfortunate Colt in the solitary office of the latter, and how poor Colt being dreadfully incensed by Adams, and imprudently permitting himself to get wildly excited, was at unawares hurried into his fatal act—an act which certainly no man could possibly deplore more than the actor himself. Often it had occurred to me in my ponderings upon the subject, that had that altercation taken place in the public street, or at a private residence, it would not have terminated as it did. It was the circumstance of being alone in a solitary office, upstairs, of a building entirely unhallowed by humanizing domestic associations—an uncarpeted office, doubtless, of a dusty, haggard sort of appearance—this it must have been, which greatly helped to enhance the irritable desperation of the hapless Colt.

But when this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and

threw him How? Why, simply by recalling the divine injunction 'A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another' Yes, this it was that saved me Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle—a great safeguard to its possessor Men have committed murder for jealousy's sake, and anger's sake, and hatred's sake, and selfishness' sake, and spiritual pride's sake, but no man, that ever I heard of, ever committed a diabolical murder for sweet charity's sake Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should, especially with high tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy At any rate, upon the occasion in question, I strove to drown my exasperated feelings towards the scrivener by benevolently construing his conduct Poor fellow, poor fellow' thought I, he don't mean anything, and besides, he has seen hard times, and ought to be indulged

I endeavoured, also, immediately to occupy myself, and at the same time to comfort my despondency I tried to fancy, that in the course of the morning, at such time as might prove agreeable to him, Bartleby, of his own free accord, would emerge from his hermitage and take up some decided line of march in the direction of the door But no Half past twelve o'clock came, Turkey began to glow in the face, overturn his ink stand, and become generally obstreperous, Nippers abated down into quietude and courtesy, Ginger Nut munched his noon apple, and Bartleby remained standing at his window in one of his profoundest dead wall reveries Will it be credited? Ought I to acknowledge it? That afternoon I left the office without saying one further word to him

Some days now passed, during which, at leisure intervals, I looked a little into 'Edwards on the Will', and 'Priestley on Necessity' Under the circumstances, those books induced a salutary feeling Gradually I slid into the persuasion that these troubles of mine,

touching the scrivener, had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom Yes, Bartleby, stay there behind your screen, thought I, I shall persecute you no more, you are harmless and noiseless as any of these old chairs, in short, I never feel so private as when I know you are here At last I see it, I feel it, I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life I am content Others may have loftier parts to enact, but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain

I believe that this wise and blessed frame of mind would have continued with me, had it not been for the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon me by my professional friends who visited the rooms But thus it often is, that the constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the more generous Though to be sure, when I reflected upon it, it was not strange that people entering my office should be struck by the peculiar aspect of the unaccountable Bartleby, and so be tempted to throw out some sinister observations concerning him Sometimes an attorney, having business with me, and calling at my office, and finding no one but the scrivener there, would undertake to obtain some sort of precise information from him touching my whereabouts, but without heeding his idle talk, Bartleby would remain standing immovable in the middle of the room So after contemplating him in that position for a time, the attorney would depart, no wiser than he came

Also, when a reference was going on, and the room full of lawyers and witnesses, and business driving fast, some deeply occupied legal gentleman present, seeing Bartleby wholly unemployed, would request him to run round to his (the legal gentleman's) office and fetch some papers for him. Thereupon, Bartleby would

tranquilly decline, and yet remain idle as before. Then the lawyer would give a great stare, and turn to me. And what could I say? At last I was made aware that all through the circle of my professional acquaintance, a whisper of wonder was running round, having reference to the strange creature I kept at my office. This worried me very much. And as the idea came upon me of his possibly turning out a long lived man, and keep occupying my chambers, and denying my authority, and perplexing my visitors, and scandalizing my professional reputation, and casting a general gloom over the premises, keeping soul and body together to the last upon his savings (for doubtless he spent but half a dime a day), and in the end perhaps outlive me, and claim possession of my office by right of his perpetual occupancy—as all these dark anticipations crowded upon me more and more, and my friends continually intruded their relentless remarks upon the apparition in my room, a great change was wrought in me. I resolved to gather all my faculties together, and forever rid me of this intolerable incubus.

Ere revolving any complicated project, however, adapted to this end, I first simply suggested to Bartleby the propriety of his permanent departure. In a calm and serious tone, I commended the idea to his careful and mature consideration. But, having taken three days to meditate upon it, he apprised me, that his original determination remained the same, in short, that he still preferred to abide with me.

What shall I do? I now said to myself, buttoning up my coat to the last button. What shall I do? what ought I to do? what does conscience say I *should* do with this man, or, rather, ghost. Rid myself of him, I must, go, he shall. But how? You will not thrust him, the poor, pale, passive mortal—you will not thrust such a helpless creature out of your door? you will not dishonour yourself by such cruelty? No, I will not, I cannot do that. Rather would I let him live and die

here, and then mason up his remains in the wall What, then, will you do ? For all your coaxing, he will not budge Bribes he leaves under your own paper-weight on your table , in short, it is quite plain that he prefers to cling to you

Then something severe, something unusual must be done What ! surely you will not have him collared by a constable, and commit his innocent pallor to the common jail ? And upon what ground could you procure such a thing to be done ?—a vagrant, is he ? What ! he a vagrant, a wanderer, who refuses to budge ? It is because he will *not* be a vagrant, then, that you seek to count him *as* a vagrant That is too absurd No visible means of support, there I have him Wrong again for indubitably he *does* support himself, and that is the only unanswerable proof that any man can show of his possessing the means so to do No more, then Since he will not quit me, I must quit him I will change my offices , I will move elsewhere, and give him fair notice, that if I find him on my new premises I will then proceed against him as a common trespasser

Acting accordingly, next day I thus addressed him ‘ I find these chambers too far from the City Hall , the air is unwholesome In a word, I propose to remove my offices next week, and shall no longer require your services I tell you this now, in order that you may seek another place ’

He made no reply, and nothing more was said

On the appointed day I engaged carts and men, proceeded to my chambers, and, having but little furniture, everything was removed in a few hours Throughout, the scrivener remained standing behind the screen, which I directed to be removed the last thing It was withdrawn , and, being folded up like a huge folio, left him the motionless occupant of a naked room I stood in the entry watching him a moment, while something from within me upbraided me

I re entered, with my hand in my pocket—and—and my heart in my mouth

'Good bye, Bartleby, I am going—good bye, and God some way bless you, and take that,' slipping something in his hand But it dropped upon the floor, and then—strange to say—I tore myself from him whom I had so longed to be rid of

Established in my new quarters, for a day or two I kept the door locked, and started at every footfall in the passages When I returned to my rooms, after any little absence, I would pause at the threshold for an instant, and attentively listen ere applying my key But these fears were needless Bartleby never came nigh me

I thought all was going well, when a perturbed looking stranger visited me, inquiring whether I was the person who had recently occupied rooms at No — Wall Street

Full of forebodings, I replied that I was

'Then, sir,' said the stranger, who proved a lawyer, 'you are responsible for the man you left there He refuses to do any copying, he refuses to do anything, he says he prefers not to, and he refuses to quit the premises'

'I am very sorry, sir,' said I, with assumed tranquillity, but an inward tremor, 'but, really, the man you allude to is nothing to me—he is no relation or apprentice of mine, that you should hold me responsible for him'

'In mercy's name, who is he?'

'I certainly cannot inform you I know nothing about him Formerly I employed him as a copyist, but he has done nothing for me now for some time past'

'I shall settle him, then—good morning, sir'

Several days passed, and I heard nothing more, and, though I often felt a charitable prompting to call at the place and see poor Bartleby, yet a certain squeamishness, of I know not what, withheld me

All is over with him, by this time, thought I, at last, when, through another week, no further intelligence reached me. But, coming to my room the day after, I found several persons waiting at my door in a high state of nervous excitement.

'That's the man—here he comes,' cried the foremost one, whom I recognized as the lawyer who had previously called upon me alone.

'You must take him away, sir, at once,' cried a portly person among them, advancing upon me, and whom I knew to be the landlord of No. — Wall Street. 'These gentlemen, my tenants, cannot stand it any longer, Mr B——,' pointing to the lawyer, 'has turned him out of his room, and he now persists in haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in the entry by night. Everybody is concerned, clients are leaving the offices, some fears are entertained of a mob, something you must do, and that without delay.'

Aghast at this torrent, I fell back before it, and would fain have locked myself in my new quarters. In vain I persisted that Bartleby was nothing to me—no more than to any one else. In vain—I was the last person known to have anything to do with him, and they held me to the terrible account. Fearful, then, of being exposed in the papers (as one person present obscurely threatened), I considered the matter, and, at length, said, that if the lawyer would give me a confidential interview with the scrivener, in his (the lawyer's) own room, I would, that afternoon, strive my best to rid them of the nuisance they complained of.

Going upstairs to my old haunt, there was Bartleby silently sitting upon the banister at the landing.

'What are you doing here, Bartleby?' said I.

'Sitting upon the banister,' he mildly replied.

I motioned him into the lawyer's room, who then left us.

'Bartleby,' said I, 'are you aware that you are the

cause of great tribulation to me, by persisting in occupying the entry after being dismissed from the office ?'

No answer

'Now one of two things must take place. Either you must do something, or something must be done to you. Now what sort of business would you like to engage in ? Would you like to re-engage in copying for some one ?'

'No, I would prefer not to make any change.'

'Would you like a clerkship in a dry goods store ?'

'There is too much confinement about that. No, I would not like a clerkship, but I am not particular.'

'Too much confinement,' I cried, 'why, you keep yourself confined all the time !'

'I would prefer not to take a clerkship,' he rejoined, as if to settle that little item at once.

'How would a bar-tender's business suit you ? There is no trying of the eyesight in that.'

'I would not like it at all, though, as I said before, I am not particular.'

His unwonted wordiness inspired me. I returned to the charge.

'Well, then, would you like to travel through the country collecting bills for the merchants ? That would improve your health.'

'No, I would prefer to be doing something else.'

'How, then, would going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation—how would that suit you ?'

'Not at all. It does not strike me that there is anything definite about that. I like to be stationary. But I am not particular.'

'Stationary you shall be, then,' I cried, now losing all patience, and, for the first time in all my exasperating connexion with him, fairly flying into a passion. 'If you do not go away from these premises before night, I shall feel bound—indeed, I *am* bound—to—to quit the premises myself !' I rather absurdly concluded, knowing not with what possible threat to try to frighten him.



immobility into complance Despairing of all further efforts, I was precipitately leaving him, when a final thought occurred to me—one which had not been wholly unindulged before

‘Bartleby,’ said I, in the kindest tone I could assume under such exciting circumstances, ‘will you go home with me now—not to my office, but my dwelling—and remain there till we can conclude upon some convenient arrangement for you at our leisure? Come, let us start now, right away’

‘No, at present I would prefer not to make any change at all’

I answered nothing, but, effectually dodging every one by the suddenness and rapidity of my flight, rushed from the building, ran up Wall Street towards Broadway, and, jumping into the first omnibus, was soon removed from pursuit As soon as tranquillity returned, I distinctly perceived that I had now done all that I possibly could, both in respect to the demands of the landlord and his tenants, and with regard to my own desire and sense of duty, to benefit Bartleby, and shield him from rude persecution I now strove to be entirely care free and quiescent, and my conscience justified me in the attempt, though, indeed, it was not so successful as I could have wished So fearful was I of being again hunted out by the incensed landlord and his exasperated tenants, that, surrendering my business to Nippers, for a few days, I drove about the upper part of the town and through the suburbs, in my rockaway, crossed over to Jersey City and Hoboken, and paid fugitive visits to Manhattanville and Astoria In fact, I almost lived in my rockaway for the time

When again I entered my office, lo, a note from the landlord lay upon the desk I opened it with trembling hands It informed me that the writer had sent to the police, and had Bartleby removed to the Tombs as a vagrant Moreover, since I knew more about him than any one else, he wished me to appear at that place, and

make a suitable statement of the facts These tidings had a conflicting effect upon me At first I was indignant, but, at last, almost approved The landlord's energetic, summary disposition had led him to adopt a procedure which I do not think I would have decided upon myself, and yet, as a last resort, under such peculiar circumstances, it seemed the only plan

As I afterwards learned, the poor scrivener, when told that he must be conducted to the Tombs, offered not the slightest obstacle, but, in his pale, unmoving way, silently acquiesced

Some of the compassionate and curious bystanders joined the party, and headed by one of the constables arm in arm with Bartleby, the silent procession filed its way through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon

The same day I received the note, I went to the Tombs, or, to speak more properly, the Halls of Justice Seeking the right officer, I stated the purpose of my call, and was informed that the individual I described was, indeed, within. I then assured the functionary that Bartleby was a perfectly honest man, and greatly to be compassionate, however unaccountably eccentric I narrated all I knew, and closed by suggesting the idea of letting him remain in as indulgent confinement as possible, till something less harsh might be done—though, indeed, I hardly knew what At all events, if nothing else could be decided upon, the almshouse must receive him I then begged to have an interview

Being under no disgraceful charge, and quite serene and harmless in all his ways, they had permitted him freely to wander about the prison, and, especially, in the enclosed grass platted yards thereof And so I found him there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves

'Bartleby!'

'I know you,' he said, without looking round—'and I want nothing to say to you'

'It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby,' said I, keenly pained at his implied suspicion 'And to you, this should not be so vile a place Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass'

'I know where I am,' he replied, but would say nothing more, and so I left him

As I entered the corridor again, a broad meat like man, in an apron, accosted me, and, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, said, 'Is that your friend?'

'Yes'

'Does he want to starve? If he does, let him live on the prison fare, that's all'

'Who are you?' asked I, not knowing what to make of such an unofficially speaking person in such a place

'I am the grub man Such gentlemen as have friends here, hire me to provide them with something good to eat'

'Is this so?' said I, turning to the turnkey

He said it was

'Well, then,' said I, slipping some silver into the grub man's hands (for so they called him), 'I want you to give particular attention to my friend there, let him have the best dinner you can get And you must be as polite to him as possible'

'Introduce me, will you?' said the grub man, looking at me with an expression which seemed to say he was all impatience for an opportunity to give a specimen of his breeding

Thinking it would prove of benefit to the scrivener, I acquiesced, and, asking the grub-man his name, went up with him to Bartleby

'Bartleby, this is a friend, you will find him very useful to you.'

'Your sarvant, sir, your sarvant,' said the grub man, making a low salutation behind his apron 'Hope you find it pleasant here, sir, nice grounds—cool apartments—hope you'll stay with us some time—try to make it agreeable What will you have for dinner to day?'

'I prefer not to dine to day,' said Bartleby, turning away 'It would disagree with me, I am unused to dinners' So saying, he slowly moved to the other side of the enclosure, and took up a position fronting the dead wall

'How's this?' said the grub man, addressing me with a stare of astonishment 'He's odd, ain't he?'

'I think he is a little deranged,' said I sadly

'Deranged? deranged is it? Well, now, upon my word, I thought that friend of yours was a gentleman forger, they are always pale and genteel like, them forgers I can't help pity 'em—can't help it, sir Did you know Monroe Edwards?' he added touchingly, and paused Then, laying his hand piteously on my shoulder, sighed, 'he died of consumption at Sing-Sing So you weren't acquainted with Monroe?'

'No, I was never socially acquainted with any forgers But I cannot stop longer Look to my friend yonder You will not lose by it I will see you again'

Some few days after this, I again obtained admission to the Tombs, and went through the corridors in quest of Bartleby, but without finding him

'I saw him coming from his cell not long ago,' said a turnkey, 'maybe he's gone to loiter in the yards'

So I went in that direction

'Are you looking for the silent man?' said another turnkey, passing me 'Yonder he lies—sleeping in the yard there 'Tis not twenty minutes since I saw him lie down'

The yard was entirely quiet It was not accessible to the common prisoners The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them.

The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass seed, dropped by birds, had sprung.

Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused, then went close up to him, stooped over, and saw that his dim eyes were open, otherwise he seemed profoundly sleeping. Something prompted me to touch him. I felt his hand, when a tingling shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet.

The round face of the grub man peered upon me now. 'His dinner is ready. Won't he dine to day, either? Or does he live without dining?'

'Lives without dining,' said I, and closed the eyes.

'Eh!—He's asleep, ain't he?'

'With kings and counsellors,' murmured I.

There would seem little need for proceeding further in this history. Imagination will readily supply the meagre recital of poor Bartleby's interment. But, ere parting with the reader, let me say, that if this little narrative has sufficiently interested him, to awaken curiosity as to who Bartleby was, and what manner of life he led prior to the present narrator's making his acquaintance, I can only reply, that in such curiosity I fully share, but am wholly unable to gratify it. Yet here I hardly know whether I should divulge one little item of rumour, which came to my ear a few months after the scrivener's decease. Upon what basis it rested I could never ascertain, and hence, how true it is I cannot now tell. But, inasmuch as this vague report has not been without a certain suggestive interest to me, however sad, it may prove the same with some others, and so I will briefly mention it. The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk

in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration. When I think over this rumour, hardly can I express the emotions which seize me. Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring—the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulders in the grave, a bank note sent in swiftest charity—he whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more, pardon for those who died despairing, hope for those who died unhoping, good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death.

Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!

WILLIAM WILKIE COLLINS

(1824-1889)

THE LADY OF GLENWITH GRANGE

[From *After Dark* 1856]

PROLOGUE

My practice in the art of portrait painting, if it has done nothing else, has at least fitted me to turn my talents (such as they are) to a great variety of uses. I have not only taken the likenesses of men, women, and children, but have also extended the range of my brush, under stress of circumstances, to horses, dogs, houses, and in one case even to a bull—the terror and glory of his parish, and the most truculent sitter I ever had. The beast was appropriately named ‘Thunder and Lightning’, and was the property of a gentleman farmer named Garthwaite, a distant connexion of my wife’s family.

How it was that I escaped being gored to death before I had finished my picture is more than I can explain to this day. ‘Thunder and Lightning’ resented the very sight of me and my colour box, as if he viewed the taking of his likeness in the light of a personal insult. It required two men to coax him, while a third held him by a ring in his nostrils, before I could venture on beginning to work. Even then he always lashed his tail, and jerked his huge head, and rolled his fiery eyes with a devouring anxiety to have me on his horns for daring to sit down quietly and look at him. Never, I can honestly say, did I feel more heartily grateful for the blessings of soundness of limb and wholeness of skin, than when I had completed the picture of the bull.

One morning, when I had but little more than half done my unwelcome task, my friend and I were met on

our way to the bull's stable by the farm-bailiff, who informed us gravely that 'Thunder and Lightning' was just then in such an especially surly state of temper as to render it quite unsafe for me to think of painting him. I looked inquiringly at Mr Garthwaite, who smiled with an air of comic resignation, and said—'Very well, then, we have nothing for it but to wait till to-morrow. What do you say to a morning's fishing, Mr Kerby, now that my bull's bad temper has given us a holiday?'

I replied, with perfect truth, that I knew nothing about fishing. But Mr Garthwaite, who was as ardent an angler in his way as Izaak Walton himself, was not to be appeased even by the best of excuses. 'It is never too late to learn,' cried he. 'I will make a fisherman of you in no time, if you will only attend to my directions.' It was impossible for me to make any more apologies, without the risk of appearing discourteous. So I thanked my host for his friendly intentions, and, with some secret misgivings, accepted the first fishing-rod that he put into my hands.

'We shall soon get there,' said Mr Garthwaite. 'I am taking you to the best mill stream in the neighbourhood.' It was all one to me whether we got there soon or late, and whether the stream was good or bad. However, I did my best to conceal my unsportsmanlike apathy, and tried to look quite happy and very impatient to begin, as we drew near to the mill, and heard louder and louder the gushing of many waters all around it.

Leading the way immediately to a place beneath the falling stream, where there was a deep, eddying pool, Mr Garthwaite baited and threw in his line before I had fixed the joints of my fishing rod. This first difficulty overcome, I involuntarily plunged into some excellent, but rather embarrassing, sport with my line and hook. I caught every one of my garments, from head to foot, I angled for my own clothes with the



dexterity and success of Izaak Walton himself I caught my hat, my jacket, my waistcoat my trousers, my fingers, and my thumbs—some devil possessed my hook, some more than eel like vitality twirled and twisted in every inch of my line. By the time my host arrived to assist me, I had attached myself to my fishing rod, apparently for life. All difficulties yielded, however, to his patience and skill, my hook was baited for me, and thrown in, my rod was put into my hand, my friend went back to his place, and we began at last to angle in earnest.

We certainly caught a few fish (in *my* case, I mean, of course, that the fish caught themselves), but they were scanty in number and light in weight. Whether it was the presence of the miller's foreman—a gloomy personage, who stood staring disastrously upon us from a little flower garden on the opposite bank—that cast an adverse influence over our sport, or whether my want of faith and earnestness as an angler acted retributively on my companion as well as myself, I know not, but it is certain that he got almost as little reward for his skill as I got for my patience. After nearly two hours of intense expectation on my part, and intense angling on his, Mr Garthwaite jerked his line out of the water in a rage, and bade me follow him to another place, declaring that the stream must have been netted by poachers in the night, who had taken all the large fish away with them, and had thrown in the small ones to grow until their next visit. We moved away, further down the bank, leaving the imperturbable foreman still in the flower garden, staring at us speechlessly on our departure, exactly as he had already stared at us on our approach.

'Stop a minute,' said Mr Garthwaite suddenly, after we had walked some distance in silence by the side of the stream, 'I have an idea. Now we *are* out for a day's angling, we won't be baulked. Instead of trying the water here again, we will go where I know, by experi-

ence, that the fishing is excellent And what is more, you shall be introduced to a lady whose appearance is sure to interest you, and whose history, I can tell you beforehand, is a very remarkable one'

'Indeed,' I said 'May I ask in what way?'

'She is connected,' answered Mr Garthwaite, 'with an extraordinary story, which relates to a family once settled in an old house in this neighbourhood Her name is Miss Welwyn, but she is less formally known among the poor people about here, who love her dearly, and honour her almost superstitiously, as the Lady of Glenwith Grange Wait till you have seen her before you ask me to say anything more She lives in the strictest retirement, I am almost the only visitor who is admitted Don't say you had rather not go in Any friend of mine will be welcome at the Grange (the scene of the story, remember), for my sake—the more especially because I have never abused my privilege of introduction The place is not above two miles from here, and the stream (which we call, in our county dialect, Glenwith Beck,) runs through the ground

As we walked on, Mr Garthwaite's manner altered. He became unusually silent and thoughtful The mention of Miss Welwyn's name had evidently called up some recollections which were not in harmony with his every day mood Feeling that to talk to him on any indifferent subject would be only to interrupt his thoughts to no purpose, I walked by his side in perfect silence, looking out already with some curiosity and impatience for a first view of Glenwith Grange We stopped, at last, close by an old church, standing on the outskirts of a pretty village The low wall of the churchyard was bounded on one side by a plantation, and was joined by a park paling, in which I noticed a small wicket-gate Mr Garthwaite opened it, and led me along a shrubby-path, which conducted us circuitously to the dwelling house

We had evidently entered by a private way, for we

approached the building by the back I looked up at it curiously, and saw standing at one of the windows on the lower floor a little girl watching us as we advanced. She seemed to be about nine or ten years old. I could not help stopping a moment to look up at her, her clear complexion and her long dark hair were so beautiful. And yet there was something in her expression—a dimness and vacancy in her large eyes—a changeless unmeaning smile on her parted lips—which seemed to jar with all that was naturally attractive in her face, which perplexed, disappointed, and even shocked me, though I hardly knew why. Mr Garthwaite, who had been walking along thoughtfully, with his eyes on the ground, turned back when he found me lingering behind him, looked up where I was looking, started a little, I thought, then took my arm, whispered rather impatiently, ‘Don’t say anything about having seen that poor child when you are introduced to Miss Welwyn, I’ll tell you why afterwards,’ and led me round hastily to the front of the building.

It was a very dreary old house, with a lawn in front thickly sprinkled with flower beds, and creepers of all sorts climbing in profusion about the heavy stone porch and the mullions of the lower windows. In spite of these prettiest of all ornaments clustering brightly round the building—in spite of the perfect repair in which it was kept from top to bottom—there was something repellent to me in the aspect of the whole place—a deathly stillness hung over it, which fell oppressively on my spirits. When my companion rang the loud, deep toned bell, the sound startled me as if we had been committing a crime in disturbing the silence. And when the door was opened by an old female servant (while the hollow echo of the bell was still vibrating in the air), I could hardly imagine it possible that we should be let in. We were admitted, however, without the slightest demur. I remarked that there was the same atmosphere of dreary repose inside the house which I had already

observed, or rather felt, outside it No dogs barked at our approach—no doors banged in the servants' offices—no heads peeped over the banisters—not one of the ordinary domestic consequences of an unexpected visit in the country met either eye or ear The large shadowy apartment, half library, half breakfast room, into which we were ushered, was as solitary as the hall or entrance, unless I except such drowsy evidences of life as were here presented to us, in the shape of an Angola cat and a gray parrot—the first lying asleep in a chair, the second sitting ancient, solemn, and voiceless, in a large cage

Mr Garthwaite walked to the window when we entered, without saying a word Determining to let his taciturn humour have its way, I asked him no questions, but looked around the room to see what information it would give me (and rooms often do give such information) about the character and habits of the owner of the house

Two tables covered with books were the first objects that attracted me On approaching them, I was surprised to find that the all-influencing periodical literature of the present day—whose sphere is already almost without limit, whose readers, even in our time, may be numbered by millions—was entirely unrepresented on Miss Welwyn's table Nothing modern, nothing contemporary in the world of books, presented itself Of all the volumes beneath my hand, not one bore the badge of the circulating library, or wore the flaring modern livery of gilt cloth Every work that I took up had been written at least fifteen or twenty years since The prints hanging round the walls (towards which I next looked) were all engraved from devotional subjects by the old masters the music stand contained no music of later date than the compositions of Haydn and Mozart Whatever I examined besides, told me, with the same consistency, the same strange tale The owner of these possessions lived in the bygone time.

lived among old recollections and old associations—a voluntary recluse from all that was connected with the passing day. In Miss Welwyn's house, the stir, the tumult, the 'idle business' of the world, evidently appealed in vain to sympathies which grew no longer with the growing hour.

As these thoughts were passing through my mind, the door opened, and the lady herself appeared.

She looked certainly past the prime of life, longer past it, as I afterwards discovered, than she really was. But I never remember, in any other face, to have seen so much of the better part of the beauty of early womanhood still remaining, as I saw in hers. Sorrow had evidently passed over the fair calm countenance before me, but had left resignation there as its only trace. Her expression was still youthful—youthful in its kindness and its candour especially. It was only when I looked at her hair, that was now growing grey—at her wan thin hands—at the faint lines marked round her mouth—at the sad serenity of her eyes, that I fairly detected the mark of age, and, more than that, the token of some great grief, which had been conquered, but not banished. Even from her voice alone—from the peculiar uncertainty of its low calm tones when she spoke—it was easy to conjecture that she must have passed through sufferings, at some time of her life, which had tried to the quick the noble nature that they could not subdue.

Mr Garthwaite and she met each other almost like brother and sister. It was plain that the friendly intimacy between them had been of very long duration. Our visit was a short one. The conversation never advanced beyond the commonplace topics suited to the occasion. It was, therefore, from what I saw, and not from what I heard, that I was enabled to form my judgement of Miss Welwyn. Deeply as she had interested me—far more deeply than I at all know how to explain in fitting words—I cannot say that I was

unwilling to depart when we rose to take leave. Though nothing could be more courteous and more kind than her manner towards me during the whole interview, I could still perceive that it cost her some effort to repress in my presence the shades of sadness and reserve which seemed often ready to steal over her. And I must confess that when I once or twice heard the half-sigh stifled, and saw the momentary relapse into thoughtfulness suddenly restrained, I felt an indefinable awkwardness in my position which made me ill at ease, which set me doubting whether, as a perfect stranger, I had done right in suffering myself to be introduced where no new faces could awaken either interest or curiosity, where no new sympathies could ever be felt, no new friendships ever be formed.

As soon as we had taken leave of Miss Welwyn, and were on our way to the stream in her grounds, I more than satisfied Mr Garthwaite that the impression the lady had produced on me was of no transitory kind, by overwhelming him with questions about her—not omitting one or two incidental inquiries on the subject of the little girl whom I had seen at the back window. He only rejoined that his story would answer all my questions, and that he would begin to tell it as soon as we had arrived at Glenwith Beck, and were comfortably settled to fishing.

Five minutes more of walking brought us to the bank of the stream, and showed us the water running smoothly and slowly, tinged with the softest green lustre from the reflections of trees which almost entirely arched it over. Leaving me to admire the view at my ease, Mr Garthwaite occupied himself with the necessary preparations for angling, baiting my hook as well as his own. Then, desiring me to sit near him on the bank, he at last satisfied my curiosity by beginning his story. I shall relate it in his own manner, and, as nearly as possible, in his own words.

THE ANGLER'S STORY  
OF  
THE LADY OF GLENWITH GRANGE

I HAVE known Miss Welwyn long enough to be able to bear personal testimony to the truth of many of the particulars which I am now about to relate. I knew her father, and her younger sister Rosamond, and I was acquainted with the Frenchman who became Rosamond's husband. These are the persons of whom it will be principally necessary for me to speak. They are the only prominent characters in my story.

Miss Welwyn's father died some years since. I remember him very well—though he never excited in me, or in any one else that I ever heard of, the slightest feeling of interest. When I have said that he inherited a very large fortune, amassed during his father's time, by speculations of a very daring, very fortunate, but not always very honourable kind, and that he bought this old house with the notion of raising his social position, by making himself a member of our landed aristocracy in these parts, I have told you as much about him, I suspect, as you would care to hear. He was a thoroughly commonplace man, with no great virtues and no great vices in him. He had a little heart, a feeble mind, an amiable temper, a tall figure, and a handsome face. More than this need not, and cannot, be said on the subject of Mr. Welwyn's character.

I must have seen the late Mrs. Welwyn very often as a child, but I cannot say that I remember anything more of her than that she was tall and handsome, and very generous and sweet tempered towards me when I was in her company. She was her husband's superior in birth, as in everything else, was a great reader of books in all languages, and possessed such admirable talents as a musician, that her wonderful playing on the organ is remembered and talked of to this day among

the old people in our country houses about here All her friends, as I have heard, were disappointed when she married Mr Welwyn, rich as he was, and were afterwards astonished to find her preserving the appearance, at least, of being perfectly happy with a husband who, neither in mind nor heart, was worthy of her

It was generally supposed (and I have no doubt correctly), that she found her great happiness and her great consolation in her little girl Ida—now the lady from whom we have just parted The child took after her mother from the first—inheriting her mother's fondness for books, her mother's love of music, her mother's quick sensibilities, and, more than all, her mother's quiet firmness, patience, and loving kindness of disposition From Ida's earliest years, Mrs Welwyn undertook the whole superintendence of her education The two were hardly ever apart, within doors or without Neighbours and friends said that the little girl was being brought up too fancifully, was not enough among other children, was sadly neglected as to all reasonable and practical teaching, and was perilously encouraged in those dreamy and imaginative tendencies of which she had naturally more than her due share There was, perhaps, some truth in this, and there might have been still more, if Ida had possessed an ordinary character, or had been reserved for an ordinary destiny But she was a strange child from the first, and a strange future was in store for her

Little Ida reached her eleventh year without either brother or sister to be her playfellow and companion at home Immediately after that period, however, her sister Rosamond was born Though Mr Welwyn's own desire was to have had a son, there were, nevertheless, great rejoicings yonder in the old house on the birth of this second daughter But they were all turned, only a few months afterwards, to the bitterest grief and despair the Grange lost its mistress While Rosamond was still an infant in arms, her mother died



Mrs Welwyn had been afflicted with some disorder after the birth of her second child, the name of which I am not learned enough in medical science to be able to remember. I only know that she recovered from it, to all appearance, in an unexpectedly short time, that she suffered a fatal relapse, and that she died a lingering and a painful death. Mr Welwyn (who, in after years, had a habit of vain gloriously describing his marriage as 'a love match on both sides') was really fond of his wife in his own frivolous feeble way, and suffered as acutely as such a man could suffer, during the latter days of her illness, and at the terrible time when the doctors, one and all, confessed that her life was a thing to be despaired of. He burst into irrepressible passions of tears, and was always obliged to leave the sick room whenever Mrs Welwyn spoke of her approaching end. The last solemn words of the dying woman, the tenderest messages that she could give, the dearest parting wishes that she could express, the most earnest commands that she could leave behind her, the gentlest reasons for consolation that she could suggest to the survivors among those who loved her, were not poured into her husband's ear, but into her child's. From the first period of her illness, Ida had persisted in remaining in the sick room, rarely speaking, never showing outwardly any signs of terror or grief, except when she was removed from it, and then bursting into hysterical passions of weeping, which no expostulations, no arguments, no commands—nothing, in short, but bringing her back to the bedside—ever availed to calm. Her mother had been her playfellow, her companion, her dearest and most familiar friend, and there seemed something in the remembrance of this which, instead of overwhelming the child with despair, strengthened her to watch faithfully and bravely by her dying parent to the very last.

When the parting moment was over, and when Mr Welwyn, unable to bear the shock of being present in

the house of death at the time of his wife's funeral, left home and went to stay with one of his relations in a distant part of England, Ida, whom it had been his wish to take away with him, petitioned earnestly to be left behind 'I promised mamma, before she died that I would be as good to my little sister Rosamond as she had been to me,' said the child, simply, 'and she told me in return that I might wait here and see her laid in her grave' There happened to be an aunt of Mrs Welwyn, and an old servant of the family, in the house at this time, who understood Ida much better than her father did, and they persuaded him not to take her away I have heard my mother say that the effect of the child's appearance at the funeral on her, and on all who went to see it, was something that she could never think of without the tears coming into her eyes, and could never forget to the last day of her life

It must have been very shortly after this period that I saw Ida for the first time

I remember accompanying my mother on a visit to the old house we have just left, in the summer, when I was at home for the holidays It was a lovely, sun-shiny morning There was nobody in doors, and we walked out into the garden As we approached that lawn yonder, on the other side of the shrubbery, I saw, first, a young woman in mourning (apparently a servant) sitting reading, then a little girl, dressed all in black, moving towards us slowly over the bright turf, and holding up before her a baby, whom she was trying to teach to walk She looked, to my ideas, so very young to be engaged in such an occupation as this, and her gloomy black frock appeared to be such an unnatural grave garment for a mere child of her age, and looked so doubly dismal by contrast with the brilliant sunny lawn on which she stood, that I quite started when I first saw her, and eagerly asked my mother who she was The answer informed me of the sad family story, which I have been just relating to you

Mrs Welwyn had then been buried about three months, and Ida, in her childish way was trying, as she had promised, to supply her mother's place to her infant sister Rosamond

I only mention this simple incident, because it is necessary, before I proceed to the eventful part of my narrative, that you should know exactly in what relation the sisters stood towards one another from the first. Of all the last parting words that Mrs Welwyn had spoken to her child, none had been oftener repeated, none more solemnly urged, than those which had commended the little Rosamond to Ida's love and care. To other persons, the full, the all trusting dependence which the dying mother was known to have placed in a child hardly eleven years old, seemed merely a proof of that helpless desire to cling even to the feeblest consolations, which the approach of death so often brings with it. But the event showed, that the trust so strangely placed had not been ventured vainly when it was committed to young and tender hands. The whole future existence of the child was one noble proof that she had been worthy of her mother's dying confidence, when it was first reposed in her. In that simple incident which I have just mentioned, the new life of the two motherless sisters was all foreshadowed.

Time passed. I left school—went to college—travelled in Germany, and stayed there some time to learn the language. At every interval when I came home, and asked about the Welwyns, the answer was, in substance, almost always the same. Mr Welwyn was giving his regular dinners, performing his regular duties as a county magistrate, enjoying his regular recreations as an amateur farmer and an eager sportsman. His two daughters were never separate. Ida was the same strange, quiet, retiring girl, that she had always been, and was still (as the phrase went) 'spoiling' Rosamond in every way in which it was possible for an elder sister to spoil a younger by too much kindness.

I myself went to the Grange occasionally, when I was in this neighbourhood, in holiday and vacation time, and was able to test the correctness of the picture of life there which had been drawn for me. I remember the two sisters, when Rosamond was four or five years old, and when Ida seemed to me, even then, to be more like the child's mother than her sister. She bore with her little caprices as sisters do not bear with one another. She was so patient at lesson-time, so anxious to conceal any weariness that might overcome her in play-hours, so proud when Rosamond's beauty was noticed, so grateful for Rosamond's kisses when the child thought of bestowing them, so quick to notice all that Rosamond did, and to attend to all that Rosamond said, even when visitors were in the room, that she seemed, to my boyish observation, altogether different from other elder sisters in other family circles into which I was then received.

I remember then, again, when Rosamond was just growing to womanhood, and was in high spirits at the prospect of spending a season in London and being presented at Court. She was very beautiful at that time—much handsomer than Ida. Her 'accomplishments' were talked of far and near in our country circles. Few, if any, of the people, however, who applauded her playing and singing, who admired her water colour drawings, who were delighted at her fluency when she spoke French, and amazed at her ready comprehension when she read German, knew how little of all this elegant mental cultivation and nimble manual dexterity she owed to her governesses and masters, and how much to her elder sister. It was Ida who really found out the means of stimulating her when she was idle, Ida who helped her through all her worst difficulties, Ida who gently conquered her defects of memory over her books, her inaccuracies of ear at the piano, her errors of taste when she took the brush or pencil in hand. It was Ida alone who worked these

marvels, and whose all sufficient reward for her hardest exertions was a chance word of kindness from her sister's lips Rosamond was not unaffectionate, and not ungrateful, but she inherited much of her father's commonness and frivolity of character She became so accustomed to owe everything to her sister—to resign all her most trifling difficulties to Ida's ever ready care—to have all her tastes consulted by Ida's ever-watchful kindness—that she never appreciated, as it deserved, the deep devoted love of which she was the object When Ida refused two good offers of marriage, Rosamond was as much astonished as the veriest strangers, who wondered why the elder Miss Welwyn seemed bent on remaining single all her life

When the journey to London, to which I have already alluded, took place, Ida accompanied her father and sister If she had consulted her own tastes, she would have remained in the country, but Rosamond declared that she should feel quite lost and helpless twenty times a day, in town, without her sister It was in the nature of Ida to sacrifice herself to any one whom she loved, on the smallest occasions as well as the greatest Her affection was as intuitively ready to sanctify Rosamond's slightest caprices as to excuse Rosamond's most thoughtless faults So she went to London cheerfully, to witness with pride all the little triumphs won by her sister's beauty, to hear, and never tire of hearing, all that admiring friends could say in her sister's praise

At the end of the season, Mr Welwyn and his daughters returned for a short time to the country, then left home again to spend the latter part of the autumn and the beginning of the winter in Paris

They took with them excellent letters of introduction, and saw a great deal of the best society in Paris, foreign as well as English At one of the first of the evening parties which they attended, the general topic of conversation was the conduct of a certain French nobleman, the Baron Franval, who had returned to his native

country after a long absence, and who was spoken of in terms of high eulogy by the majority of the guests present. The history of who Franval was, and of what he had done, was readily communicated to Mr Welwyn and his daughters, and was briefly this

The Baron inherited little from his ancestors besides his high rank and his ancient pedigree. On the death of his parents, he and his two unmarried sisters (their only surviving children) found the small territorial property of the Franvals, in Normandy, barely productive enough to afford a comfortable subsistence for the three. The Baron, then a young man of three and-twenty, endeavoured to obtain such military or civil employment as might become his rank, but, although the Bourbons were at that time restored to the throne of France, his efforts were ineffectual. Either his interest at Court was bad, or secret enemies were at work to oppose his advancement. He failed to obtain even the slightest favour, and, irritated by undeserved neglect, resolved to leave France, and seek occupation for his energies in foreign countries, where his rank would be no bar to his bettering his fortunes, if he pleased, by engaging in commercial pursuits.

An opportunity of the kind that he wanted unexpectedly offered itself. He left his sisters in care of an old male relative of the family at the chateau in Normandy, and sailed, in the first instance, to the West Indies, afterwards extending his wanderings to the continent of South America, and there engaging in mining transactions on a very large scale. After fifteen years of absence (during the latter part of which time false reports of his death had reached Normandy), he had just returned to France, having realized a handsome independence, with which he proposed to widen the limits of his ancestral property, and to give his sisters (who were still, like himself, unmarried) all the luxuries and advantages that affluence could bestow. The Baron's independent spirit, and generous devotion

to the honour of his family and the happiness of his surviving relatives, were themes of general admiration in most of the social circles of Paris. He was expected to arrive in the capital every day, and it was naturally enough predicted that his reception in society there could not fail to be of the most flattering and most brilliant kind.

The Welwyns listened to this story with some little interest, Rosamond, who was very romantic, being especially attracted by it, and openly avowing to her father and sister, when they got back to their hotel, that she felt as ardent a curiosity as anybody to see the adventurous and generous Baron. The desire was soon gratified. Franval came to Paris, as had been anticipated—was introduced to the Welwyns—met them constantly in society—made no favourable impression on Ida, but won the good opinion of Rosamond from the first, and was regarded with such high approval by their father, that when he mentioned his intention of visiting England in the spring of the new year, he was cordially invited to spend the hunting season at Glenwith Grange.

I came back from Germany about the same time that the Welwyns returned from Paris, and at once set myself to improve my neighbourly intimacy with the family. I was very fond of Ida, more fond, perhaps, than my vanity will now allow me to—, but that is of no consequence. It is much more to the purpose to tell you, that I heard the whole of the Baron's story enthusiastically related by Mr Welwyn and Rosamond, that he came to the Grange at the appointed time, that I was introduced to him, and that he produced as unfavourable an impression upon me as he had already produced upon Ida.

It was whimsical enough, but I really could not tell why I disliked him, though I could account very easily, according to my own notions, for his winning the favour and approval of Rosamond and her father. He was

certainly a handsome man, as far as features went, he had a winning gentleness and graceful respect in his manner when he spoke to women, and he sang remarkably well, with one of the sweetest tenor voices I ever heard. These qualities alone were quite sufficient to attract any girl of Rosamond's disposition, and I certainly never wondered why he was a favourite of hers.

Then, as to her father, the Baron was not only fitted to win his sympathy and regard in the field, by proving himself an ardent sportsman and an excellent rider, but was also, in virtue of some of his minor personal peculiarities, just the man to gain the friendship of his host. Mr Welwyn was as ridiculously prejudiced as most weak-headed Englishmen are, on the subject of foreigners in general. In spite of his visit to Paris, the vulgar notion of a Frenchman continued to be his notion, both while he was in France and when he returned from it. Now, the Baron was as unlike the traditional 'Mounseer' of English songs, plays, and satires, as a man could well be, and it was on account of this very dissimilarity that Mr Welwyn first took a violent fancy to him, and then invited him to his house. Franval spoke English remarkably well, wore neither beard, moustachios, nor whiskers, kept his hair cut almost unbecomingly short, dressed in the extreme of plainness and modest good taste, talked little in general society, uttered his words, when he did speak, with singular calmness and deliberation, and, to crown all, had the greater part of his acquired property invested in English securities. In Mr Welwyn's estimation, such a man as this was a perfect miracle of a Frenchman, and he admired and encouraged him accordingly.

I have said that I disliked him, yet could not assign a reason for my dislike, and I can only repeat it now. He was remarkably polite to me, we often rode together in hunting, and sat near each other at the



Grange table, but I could never become familiar with him. He always gave me the idea of a man who had some mental reservation in saying the most trifling thing. There was a constant restraint, hardly perceptible to most people, but plainly visible, nevertheless, to me, which seemed to accompany his lightest words, and to hang about his most familiar manner. This, however, was no just reason for my secretly disliking and distrusting him as I did. Ida said as much to me, I remember, when I confessed to her what my feelings towards him were, and tried (but vainly) to induce her to be equally candid with me in return. She seemed to shrink from the tacit condemnation of Rosamond's opinion which such a confidence on her part would have implied. And yet she watched the growth of that opinion—or, in other words, the growth of her sister's liking for the Baron—with an apprehension and sorrow which she tried fruitlessly to conceal. Even her father began to notice that her spirits were not so good as usual, and to suspect the cause of her melancholy. I remember he jested, with all the dense insensibility of a stupid man, about Ida having invariably been jealous, from a child, if Rosamond looked kindly upon anybody except her elder sister.

The spring began to get far advanced towards summer. Franval paid a visit to London, came back in the middle of the season to Glenwith Grange, wrote to put off his departure for France, and, at last (not at all to the surprise of anybody who was intimate with the Welwyns) proposed to Rosamond, and was accepted. He was candour and generosity itself when the preliminaries of the marriage settlement were under discussion. He quite overpowered Mr Welwyn and the lawyers with references, papers, and statements of the distribution and extent of his property, which were found to be perfectly correct. His sisters were written to, and returned the most cordial answers, saying that the state of their health would not allow them to come

to England for the marriage, but adding a warm invitation to Normandy for the bride and her family. Nothing, in short, could be more straightforward and satisfactory than the Baron's behaviour, and the testimonies to his worth and integrity which the news of the approaching marriage produced from his relatives and his friends.

The only joyless face at the Grange now was Ida's. At any time it would have been a hard trial to her to resign that first and foremost place which she had held since childhood in her sister's heart, as she knew she must resign it when Rosamond married. But, secretly disliking and distrusting Franval as she did, she thought that he was soon to become the husband of her beloved sister filled her with a vague sense of terror which she could not explain to herself, which it was imperatively necessary that she should conceal, and which, on those very accounts, became a daily and hourly torment to her that was almost more than she could bear.

One consolation alone supported her. Rosamond and she were not to be separated. She knew that the Baron secretly disliked her as much as she disliked him, she knew that she must bid farewell to the brighter and happier part of her life on the day when she went to live under the same roof with her sister's husband, but, true to the promise made years and years ago, by her dying mother's bed—true to the affection which was the ruling and beautiful feeling of her whole existence—she never hesitated about indulging Rosamond's wish, when the girl, in her bright light-hearted way, said that she could never get on comfortably in the marriage state unless she had Ida to live with her, and help her just the same as ever. The Baron was too polite a man even to *look* dissatisfied when he heard of the proposed arrangement, and it was therefore settled from the beginning that Ida was always to live with her sister.

The marriage took place in the summer, and the bride and bridegroom went to spend their honeymoon in

Cumberland On their return to Glenwith Grange, a visit to the Baron's sisters, in Normandy, was talked of, but the execution of this project was suddenly and disastrously suspended by the death of Mr Welwyn from an attack of pleurisy.

In consequence of this calamity, the projected journey was of course deferred, and when autumn and the shooting season came, the Baron was unwilling to leave the well stocked preserves of the Grange. He seemed, indeed, to grow less and less inclined, as time advanced, for the trip to Normandy, and wrote excuse after excuse to his sisters, when letters arrived from them urging him to pay the promised visit. In the winter time, he said he would not allow his wife to risk a long journey. In the spring, his health was pronounced to be delicate. In the genial summer time, the accomplishment of the proposed visit would be impossible, for at that period the Baroness expected to become a mother. Such were the apologies which Franval seemed almost glad to be able to send to his sisters in France.

The marriage was, in the strictest sense of the term, a happy one. The Baron, though he never altogether lost the strange restraint and reserve of his manner, was, in his quiet, peculiar way, the fondest and kindest of husbands. He went to town occasionally on business, but always seemed glad to return to the Baroness, he never varied in the politeness of his bearing towards his wife's sister, he behaved with the most courteous hospitality towards all the friends of the Welwyns. In short, he thoroughly justified the good opinion which Rosamond and her father had formed of him when they first met at Paris. And yet no experience of his character thoroughly reassured Ida. Months passed on quietly and pleasantly, and still that secret sadness, that undefinable, unreasonable apprehension on Rosamond's account, hung heavily on her sister's heart.

At the beginning of the first summer months, a little

domestic inconvenience happened, which showed the Baroness, for the first time, that her husband's temper could be seriously ruffled—and that by the veriest trifle. He was in the habit of taking in two French provincial newspapers—one published at Bordeaux, and the other at Havre. He always opened these journals the moment they came, looked at one particular column of each with the deepest attention for a few minutes, then carelessly threw them aside into his waste-paper basket. His wife and her sister were at first rather surprised at the manner in which he read his two papers, but they thought no more of it when he explained that he only took them in to consult them about French commercial intelligence, which might be, occasionally, of importance to him.

These papers were published weekly. On the occasion to which I have just referred, the Bordeaux paper came on the proper day, as usual, but the Havre paper never made its appearance. This trifling circumstance seemed to make the Baron seriously uneasy. He wrote off directly to the country post-office, and to the newspaper agent in London. His wife, astonished to see his tranquillity so completely overthrown by so slight a cause, tried to restore his good humour by jesting with him about the missing newspaper. He replied by the first angry and unfeeling words that she had heard issue from his lips. She was then within about six weeks of her confinement, and very unfit to bear harsh answers from anybody—least of all from her husband.

On the second day no answer came. On the afternoon of the third, the Baron rode off to the post-town to make inquiries. About an hour after he had gone, a strange gentleman came to the Grange, and asked to see the Baroness. On being informed that she was not well enough to receive visitors, he sent up a message that his business was of great importance, and that he would wait downstairs for a second answer.

On receiving this message, Rosamond turned, as

usual, to her elder sister for advice. Ida went downstairs immediately to see the stranger. What I am now about to tell you of the extraordinary interview which took place between them, and of the shocking events that followed it, I have heard from Miss Welwyn's own lips.

She felt unaccountably nervous when she entered the room. The stranger bowed very politely, and asked, in a foreign accent, if she were the Baroness Franval. She set him right on this point, and told him she attended to all matters of business for the Baroness, adding, that, if his errand at all concerned her sister's husband, the Baron was not then at home.

The stranger answered that he was aware of it when he called, and that the unpleasant business on which he came could not be confided to the Baron—at least in the first instance.

She asked why. He said he was there to explain, and expressed himself as feeling greatly relieved at having to open his business to her, because she would, doubtless, be best able to prepare her sister for the bad news that he was, unfortunately, obliged to bring. The sudden faintness which overcame her, as he spoke those words, prevented her from addressing him in return. He poured out some water for her from a bottle which happened to be standing on the table, and asked if he might depend on her fortitude. She tried to say 'Yes', but the violent throbbing of her heart seemed to choke her. He took a foreign newspaper from his pocket, saying that he was a secret agent of the French police—that the paper was the *Havre Journal* for the past week, and that it had been expressly kept from reaching the Baron, as usual, through his (the agent's) interference. He then opened the newspaper, and begged that she would nerve herself sufficiently (for her sister's sake) to read certain lines, which would give her some hint of the business that brought him there. He pointed to the passage as he spoke. It was among the 'Shipping Entries', and was thus expressed:

'Arrived, the *Berenice*, from San Francisco, with a valuable cargo of hides. She brings one passenger, the Baron Franval, of Chateau Franval, in Normandy.'

As Miss Welwyn read the entry, her heart, which had been throbbing violently but the moment before, seemed suddenly to cease from all action, and she began to shiver, though it was a warm June evening. The agent held the tumbler to her lips, and made her drink a little of the water, entreating her very earnestly to take courage and listen to him. He then sat down, and referred again to the entry, every word he uttered seeming to burn itself in for ever (as she expressed it) on her memory and her heart.

He said 'It has been ascertained beyond the possibility of doubt that there is no mistake about the name in the lines you have just read. And it is as certain as that we are here, that there is only *one* Baron Franval now alive. The question, therefore, is, whether the passenger by the *Berenice* is the true Baron, or—I beg you most earnestly to bear with me and to compose yourself—or the husband of your sister. The person who arrived last week at Havre was scouted as an impostor by the ladies at the chateau, the moment he presented himself there as their brother, returning to them after sixteen years of absence. The authorities were communicated with, and I and my assistants were instantly sent for from Paris.

'We wasted no time in questioning the supposed impostor. He either was, or affected to be, in a perfect frenzy of grief and indignation. We just ascertained, from competent witnesses, that he bore an extraordinary resemblance to the real Baron, and that he was perfectly familiar with places and persons in and about the chateau. We just ascertained that, and then proceeded to confer with the local authorities, and to examine their private entries of suspected persons in their jurisdiction, ranging back over a past period of twenty years or more. One of the entries thus con-

sulted contained these particulars "Hector Auguste Monbrun, son of a respectable proprietor in Normandy Well educated, gentlemanlike manners On bad terms with his family Character bold, cunning, unscrupulous, self possessed Is a clever mimic May be easily recognised by his striking likeness to the Baron Franval Imprisoned at twenty for theft and assault "

Miss Welwyn saw the agent look up at her after he had read this extract from the police book, to ascertain if she was still able to listen to him He asked, with some appearance of alarm, as their eyes met, if she would like some more water She was just able to make a sign in the negative He took a second extract from his pocket-book, and went on

He said "The next entry under the same name was dated four years later, and ran thus "H A Monbrun, condemned to the galleys for life, for assassination, and other crimes not officially necessary to be here specified Escaped from custody at Toulon Is known, since the expiration of his first term of imprisonment, to have allowed his beard to grow, and to have worn his hair long, with the intention of rendering it impossible for those acquainted with him in his native province to recognise him, as heretofore, by his likeness to the Baron Franval " There were more particulars added, not important enough for extract We immediately examined the supposed impostor for, if he was Monbrun, we knew that we should find on his shoulder the two letters of the convict brand, "T F " standing for (*Travaux Forcés*) After the minutest examination with the mechanical and chemical tests used on such occasions, not the slightest trace of the brand was to be found The moment this astounding discovery was made, I started to lay an embargo on the forthcoming numbers of the *Havre Journal* for that week, which were about to be sent to the English agent in London I arrived at Havre on Saturday (the morning of publication), in time to execute my design I waited there long

enough to communicate by telegraph with my superiors in Paris, then hastened to this place What my errand here is, you may ——’

He might have gone on speaking for some moments longer, but Miss Welwyn heard no more

Her first sensation of returning consciousness was the feeling that water was being sprinkled on her face Then she saw that all the windows in the room had been set wide open, to give her air, and that she and the agent were still alone At first, she felt bewildered, and hardly knew who he was, but he soon recalled to her mind the horrible realities that had brought him there, by apologizing for not having summoned assistance when she fainted He said it was of the last importance, in Franval’s absence, that no one in the house should imagine that anything unusual was taking place in it Then, after giving her an interval of a minute or two to collect what little strength she had left, he added that he would not increase her sufferings by saying anything more, just then, on the shocking subject of the investigation which it was his duty to make—that he would leave her to recover herself, and to consider what was the best course to be taken with the Baroness in the present terrible emergency—and that he would privately return to the house between eight and nine o’clock that evening, ready to act as Miss Welwyn wished, and to afford her and her sister any aid and protection of which they might stand in need With these words he bowed, and noiselessly quitted the room

For the first few awful minutes after she was left alone, Miss Welwyn sat helpless and speechless, utterly numbed in heart, and mind, and body—then a sort of instinct (she was incapable of thinking) seemed to urge her to conceal the fearful news from her sister as long as possible She ran up stairs to Rosamond’s sitting room, and called through the door (for she dared not trust herself in her sister’s presence) that the visitor



had come on some troublesome business from their late father's lawyers, and that she was going to shut herself up, and write some long letters in connexion with that business. After she had got into her own room, she was never sensible of how time was passing—never conscious of any feeling within her, except a baseless, helpless hope that the French police might yet be proved to have made some terrible mistake—until she heard a violent shower of rain come on a little after sunset. The noise of the rain, and the freshness it brought with it in the air, seemed to awaken her as if from a painful and a fearful sleep. The power of reflection returned to her, her heart heaved and bounded with an overwhelming terror, as the thought of Rosamond came back vividly to it, her memory recurred despairingly to the long past day of her mother's death, and to the farewell promise she had made by her mother's bedside. She burst into an hysterical passion of weeping that seemed to be tearing her to pieces. In the midst of it she heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs in the courtyard, and knew that Rosamond's husband had come back.

Dipping her handkerchief in cold water, and passing it over her eyes as she left the room, she instantly hastened to her sister.

Fortunately the daylight was fading in the old-fashioned chamber that Rosamond occupied. Before they could say two words to each other, Franval was in the room. He seemed violently irritated, said that he had waited for the arrival of the mail—that the missing newspaper had not come by it—that he had got wet through—that he felt a shivering fit coming on—and that he believed he had caught a violent cold. His wife anxiously suggested some simple remedies. He roughly interrupted her, saying there was but one remedy, the remedy of going to bed, and so left them without another word. She just put her handkerchief to her eyes, and said softly to her sister, 'How he is

changed '—then spoke no more They sat silent for half an hour or longer After that, Rosamond went affectionately and forgivingly to see how her husband was She returned, saying that he was in bed, and in a deep, heavy sleep, and predicting hopefully that he would wake up quite well the next morning In a few minutes more the clock struck nine, and Ida heard the servant's step ascending the stairs She suspected what his errand was, and went out to meet him Her presentiment had not deceived her, the police agent had arrived, and was waiting for her downstairs

He asked her if she had said anything to her sister, or had thought of any plan of action, the moment she entered the room, and, on receiving a reply in the negative, inquired further if 'the Baron' had come home yet She answered that he had, that he was ill and tired, and vexed, and that he had gone to bed The agent asked in an eager whisper if she knew that he was asleep, and alone in bed? and, when he received her reply, said that he must go up into the bedroom directly

She began to feel the faintness coming over her again, and with it sensations of loathing and terror that she could neither express to others nor define to herself He said that if she hesitated to let him avail himself of this unexpected opportunity, her scruples might lead to fatal results He reminded her that if 'the Baron' were really the convict Monbrun, the claims of society and of justice demanded that he should be discovered by the first available means, and that if he were not—if some inconceivable mistake had really been committed—then, such a plan for getting immediately at the truth as was now proposed, would ensure the delivery of an innocent man from suspicion, and at the same time spare him the knowledge that he had ever been suspected This last argument had its effect on Miss Welwyn The baseless, helpless hope that the French authorities might yet be proved to be in error,

which she had already felt in her own room, returned to her now. She suffered the agent to lead her upstairs.

He took the candle from her hand when she pointed to the door, opened it softly, and, leaving it ajar, went into the room.

She looked through the gap, with a feverish, horror-struck curiosity. Franval was lying on his side in a profound sleep, with his back turned towards the door. The agent softly placed the candle upon a small reading table between the door and the bedside, softly drew down the bed-clothes a little way from the sleeper's back, then took a pair of scissors from the toilet table, and very gently and slowly began to cut away, first the loose folds, then the intervening strips of linen from the part of Franval's night gown, that was over his shoulders. When the upper part of his back had been bared in this way, the agent took the candle and held it near the flesh. Miss Welwyn heard him ejaculate some word under his breath, then saw him looking round to where she was standing, and beckoning to her to come in.

Mechanically she obeyed, mechanically she looked down where his finger was pointing. It was the convict Monbrun—there, just visible under the bright light of the candle, were the fatal letters 'T F' branded on the villain's shoulder!

Though she could neither move nor speak, the horror of this discovery did not deprive her of her consciousness. She saw the agent softly draw up the bed-clothes again into their proper position, replace the scissors on the toilet table, and take from it a bottle of smelling-salts. She felt him removing her from the bedroom, and helping her quickly downstairs, giving her the salts to smell by the way. When they were alone again, he said, with the first appearance of agitation that he had yet exhibited, 'Now, madam, for God's sake, collect all your courage, and be guided by me. You and your sister had better leave the house immediately

Have you any relatives in the neighbourhood, with whom you could take refuge?' They had none 'What is the name of the nearest town where you could get good accommodation for the night?' Harleybrook (he wrote the name down on his tablets) 'How far off is it?' Twelve miles 'You had better have the carriage out at once, to go there with as little delay as possible leaving me to pass the night here I will communicate with you to-morrow at the principal hotel Can you compose yourself sufficiently to be able to tell the head servant, if I ring for him, that he is to obey my orders till further notice?'

The servant was summoned, and received his instructions, the agent going out with him to see that the carriage was got ready quietly and quickly Miss Welwyn went upstairs to her sister

How the fearful news was first broken to Rosamond, I cannot relate to you Miss Welwyn has never confided to me, has never confided to anybody, what happened at the interview between her sister and herself that night I can tell you nothing of the shock they both suffered, except that the younger and the weaker died under it, that the elder and the stronger has never recovered from it, and never will

They went away the same night, with one attendant, to Harleybrook, as the agent had advised Before day-break Rosamond was seized with the pains of premature labour She died three days after, unconscious of the horror of her situation, wandering in her mind about past times, and singing old tunes that Ida had taught her, as she lay in her sister's arms

The child was born alive, and lives still You saw her at the window as we came in at the back way to the Grange I surprised you, I dare say, by asking you not to speak of her to Miss Welwyn Perhaps you noticed something vacant in the little girl's expression I am sorry to say that her mind is more vacant still If 'idiot' did not sound like a mocking word, however

tenderly and pityingly one may wish to utter it, I should tell you that the poor thing had been an idiot from her birth

You will, doubtless, want to hear now what happened at Glenwith Grange, after Miss Welwyn and her sister had left it. I have seen the letter which the police agent sent the next morning to Harleybrook, and, speaking from my recollection of that, I shall be able to relate all you can desire to know

First, as to the past history of the scoundrel Monbrun, I need only tell you that he was identical with an escaped convict, who, for a long term of years, had successfully eluded the vigilance of the authorities all over Europe, and in America as well. In conjunction with two accomplices, he had succeeded in possessing himself of large sums of money by the most criminal means. He also acted secretly as the 'banker' of his convict brethren, whose dishonest gains were all confided to his hands for safe keeping. He would have been certainly captured, on venturing back to France, along with his two associates, but for the daring imposture in which he took refuge, and which, if the true Baron Franval had really died abroad, as was reported, would, in all probability, never have been found out.

Besides his extraordinary likeness to the Baron, he had every other requisite for carrying on his deception successfully. Though his parents were not wealthy, he had received a good education. He was so notorious for his gentlemanlike manners among the villainous associates of his crimes and excesses, that they nicknamed him 'the Prince'. All his early life had been passed in the neighbourhood of the Chateau Franval. He knew what were the circumstances which had induced the Baron to leave it. He had been in the country to which the Baron had emigrated. He was able to refer familiarly to persons and localities, at home and abroad, with which the Baron was sure to be acquainted. And, lastly, he had an expatriation of

fifteen years to plead for him as his all sufficient excuse, if he made any slight mistakes before the Baron's sisters, in his assumed character of their long absent brother. It will be, of course, hardly necessary for me to tell you, in relation to this part of the subject, that the true Franval was immediately and honourably reinstated in the family rights of which the impostor had succeeded for a time in depriving him.

According to Monbrun's own account, he had married poor Rosamond purely for love, and the probabilities certainly are, that the pretty, innocent English girl had really struck the villain's fancy for the time, and that the easy, quiet life he was leading at the Grange pleased him, by contrast with his perilous and vagabond existence of former days. What might have happened if he had had time enough to grow wearied of his ill-fated wife and his English home, it is now useless to inquire. What really did happen on the morning when he awoke after the flight of Ida and her sister can be briefly told.

As soon as his eyes opened they rested on the police agent, sitting quietly by the bedside, with a loaded pistol in his hand. Monbrun knew immediately that he was discovered, but he never for an instant lost the self-possession for which he was famous. He said he wished to have five minutes allowed him to deliberate quietly in bed, whether he should resist the French authorities on English ground, and so gain time by obliging the one government to apply specially to have him delivered up by the other—or whether he should accept the terms officially offered to him by the agent, if he quietly allowed himself to be captured. He chose the latter course—it was suspected, because he wished to communicate personally with some of his convict associates in France, whose fraudulent gains were in his keeping, and because he felt boastfully confident of being able to escape again, whenever he pleased. Be his secret motives, however what they might, he

allowed the agent to conduct him peaceably from the Grange, first writing a farewell letter to poor Rosamond, full of heartless French sentiment and glib sophistries about Fate and Society. His own fate was not long in overtaking him. He attempted to escape again, as it had been expected he would, and was shot by the sentinel on duty at the time. I remember hearing that the bullet entered his head and killed him on the spot.

My story is done. It is ten years now since Rosamond was buried in the churchyard yonder, and it is ten years also since Miss Welwyn returned to be the lonely inhabitant of Glenwith Grange. She now lives but in the remembrances that it calls up before her of her happier existence of former days. There is hardly an object in the old house which does not tenderly and solemnly remind her of the mother, whose last wishes she lived to obey, of the sister, whose happiness was once her dearest earthly care. Those prints that you noticed on the library walls, Rosamond used to copy in the past time, when her pencil was often guided by Ida's hand. Those music books that you were looking over, she and her mother have played from together, through many a long and quiet summer's evening. She has no ties now to bind her to the present but the poor child whose affliction it is her constant effort to lighten, and the little peasant population around her, whose humble cares and wants and sorrows she is always ready to relieve. Far and near her modest charities have penetrated among us, and far and near she is heartily beloved and blessed in many a labourer's household. There is no poor man's hearth, not in this village only, but for miles away from it as well, at which you would not be received with the welcome given to an old friend, if you only told the cottagers that you knew the Lady of Glenwith Grange!

# WILLIAM HALE WHITE

(MARK RUTHERFORD)

(1831-1913)

ESTHER

[From *More Pages from a Journal* 1910]

Blackdeep Fen, 24 Nov 1838

MY DEAR ESTHER,—This is your birthday and your wedding day, and I have sent you a cake and a knitted cross over, both of which I have made myself I can still knit, although my eyes fail a bit I hope the cross-over will be useful during the winter Tell me, my dear, how you are Twenty eight years ago it is since you came into the world It was a dark day with a cold drizzling rain, but at eleven o'clock at night you were born, and the next morning was bright with beautiful sunshine Some people think that Blackdeep must always be dreary at this time of year, but they are wrong I love the Fen country It is my own country This house, as you know, has belonged to your father's forefathers for two hundred years or more, and my father's old house has been in our family nearly as long I could not live in London, but I ought not to talk in this way, for I hold it to be wrong to set anybody against what he has to do Your brother Jim is the best of sons He sits with me in the evening and reads the paper to me He goes over to Ely market every week He has his dinner at the ordinary, where many of the company drink more than is good for them, but never once has he come home the worse for liquor I had a rare fright a little while ago I thought there was something between him and one of those Stanton girls at Ely I saw she was trying to catch him It is all off now She is a town girl, stuck up, spends a lot of money on her clothes, and would have been no wife for Jim She would not have been able to put her hand to anything



here She might have broken my heart, for she would have tried to draw Jim away from me I don't believe, my dearest child, in wedded love which lessens the love for father and mother When you were going to be married what agony I went through ' It was so wicked of me, for it was jealousy with no cause I thank God you love me as much as ever I wish I could see you again at Homerton, but the journey made me so ill last winter that I dare not venture just yet —Your loving mother,

RACHEL SUTTON

Homerton, 27 Nov 1838

MY DEAREST MOTHER,—The cake was delicious it tasted of Blackdeep, and the cross-over will be most useful It will keep me warm on cold days, and the love that came with it will thicken the wool But, mother, it is not a month ago since you sent me the stockings You are always at work for me. You are just like father He gave us things not only on birth-days, but when we never looked out for them Do you remember that week when wheat dropped three shillings a quarter? He had two hundred quarters which he might have sold ten days earlier He was obliged to sell them at the next market and lost thirty pounds, but he had seen at Ely that day a little desk, and he knew I wanted a desk, and he bought it for me with a fishing rod and landing net for Jim

My husband said he could not think of anything I needed and wrote me a cheque for two pounds

O' that you could come here, and yet I am certain you must not My heart aches to have you In my day-dreams I go over the long miles to Blackdeep, through Ware, through Royston, through Cambridge, through every village, and then I feel how far away you are. I turned out of the room the other day the chair in which you always sat I could not bear to see it empty Charles noticed it had gone and ordered it to be brought back He may have suspected the reason

why I put it upstairs My dearest, dearest mother, never fear that my affection for you can become less Sometimes after marriage a woman loves her mother more than she ever loved her before

It is a black fog here and not a breath of air is stirring How different are our fogs at Blackdeep ! They may be thick, but they are white and do not make us miserable I never shall forget when I was last in Fortyacres and saw the mist lying near the river, and the church spire bright in the sunlight The churchyard and the lower part of the church were quite hidden

What a mercy Jim was not trapped by Dolly, for I suppose it was she Jim is not the first she has tried to get You are quite right She might have broken your heart, and I am sure she would have broken Jim's, for she is as hard as a millstone—Your loving child,

ESTHER

Blackdeep Fen, 3 Dec 1838

Your letter made me feel unhappy I am afraid something is on your mind What is the matter ? I was not well before I went to Homerton the last time, but maybe it was not London that upset me If you cannot leave, I shall come Let me hear by the next post

Homerton, 5 Dec 1838

I told Charles I was expecting you He said that your sudden determination seemed odd 'Your mother,' he added, 'is a woman who acts upon impulses She ought always to take time for consideration This is hardly the proper season for travelling' I asked him if he would let me go to Blackdeep He replied that, unless there was some particular reason for it, my proposal was as unwise as yours What am I to do ? A particular reason ! It is a particular reason that I pine for my mother Can there be any reason more particular than a longing for the sight of a dear face, for kisses and embraces ? You must counsel me

Blackdeep, 15 Dec 1838

As Charles imagines I am carried away by what he calls impulses, I did not answer your letter at once, and I have been thinking as much as I can. I am not a good hand at it. Your dear father had a joke against me 'Rachel, you can't think, but never mind, you can do much better without thinking than other people can with it.' I wish I had gone straight to you at once, and yet it was better I did not. It would have put Charles out, and this would not have been pleasant for either you or me. I would not have you at Blackdeep now for worlds. The low fever has broken out, and to day there were two funerals. Parson preached a sermon about it, it was a judgement from God. Perhaps it is, but why did it take your father three years ago? It is all a mystery, and it looks to me sometimes as if here on earth there were nothing but mystery. I have just heard that parson is down with the fever himself.

Do let me have a long letter at once

Homerton, 20 Dec 1838

A Mrs Perkins has been here. She sat with me for an hour. She spends her afternoons in going her rounds among her friends, as she calls them, but she does not care for them, nor do they care for her. She looks and speaks like a woman who could not care for anybody, and yet perhaps there may be somewhere a person who could move her.

I am so weary of the talk of my neighbours. It is so different from what we used to have at Blackdeep. Oh me! those evenings when father came in at dark, and Mr and Mrs Thornley came afterwards and we had supper at eight, and father and Mr Thornley smoked their pipes and drank our home brewed ale and we had all the news—how much Mr Thornley had got for his malt, how that pig-headed old Stubbs wouldn't sell his corn, and how when he began to

thresh it and the ferrets were brought, a hundred rats were killed and bushels of wheat had been eaten

You ask me what is the matter I do not deny I am not quite happy, but it would be worse than useless to dwell upon my unhappiness and try to give you reasons for it London, in the winter, most likely does not suit me I shall certainly see you in the spring, and then I hope I shall be better

Blackdeep Fen, Christmas Day, 1838

As a rule it is right to hide our troubles, but it is not right that you should hide yours from me You are my firstborn child and my only daughter There are girls who are very good, but between their mothers and them there is a wall They do what they are bid, they are kind, but that is all They live apart from those that bore them I would not give a straw for such duty and love I gathered one of our Christmas roses this morning We have taken great care to keep them from being splashed and spoilt There was not a speck on it I put it in water and could not take my eyes off it Its white flower lay spread open and I could look right down into it I thought of you When you were a little one—ay, and after you were out of short frocks—you never feared to show me every thought in your mind, you always declared that if you had wished to hide anything from me, it would have been of no use to try What a blessing that was to me! How dreadful it would be if, now that you are married, you were to change! I am sure you will not and cannot

Homerton, 1 Jan 1839

The New Year! What will happen before the end of it? I feel as if it must be something strange I have just read your last letter again, and I cannot hold myself in My dearest mother, I confess I am wretched It might be supposed that misery like mine would express itself with no effort, but it is not so it would be

far easier to describe ordinary things I am afraid also to talk about it, lest that which is dim and shapeless should become more real

Since the day we were married Charles and I have never openly quarrelled\* He is really good he spends his evenings at home and does not seem to desire entertainment elsewhere He likes to see me well dressed and does not stint in house expenditure, although he examines it carefully and pays a good many of the bills himself by cheque He has been promoted to be manager of the bank, and takes up his new duties to day Mrs Perkins, whose husband is one of the partners, told me that he had said that there is nobody in the bank equal to Charles for sound sense and business ability, that everything with which he has to do goes right, he is always calm, never in a hurry, and never betrayed into imprudence This I can well believe As you know, Jim asked him a month ago in much excitement for advice about Fordham, who owed him £200 Jim had heard there was something wrong Charles put the letter in the desk and did not mention it to me again till a week afterwards, when he asked me to tell Jim the next time I wrote to Blackdeep that he need not worry himself, as Fordham was quite safe It is certainly a comfort to a woman that her husband is a strong man and that he is much respected by his employers Of what have I to complain? O mother, life here is so dull! This is not the right word, it is common, but if you can fill it up with my meaning, there is no better It will then be terrible There is hardly a flower in the garden, although not a weed is permitted The sooty laurels unchanging through winter and summer I hate Some flowers I am sure would grow, but Charles does not care for them Neatness is what he likes, and if the beds are raked quite smooth, if the grass is closely shaven and trimmed and not a grain of gravel in the path is loose, he is content He cannot endure the least untidiness in the house If papers are

left lying loosely about, he silently puts them evenly together. He brings all his office ways into the dining-room, the pens must never be put aside unwiped and the ink-bottles must be kept filled to a certain height. We do not get much sun at any time of day in Homer-ton, and we face the west. Charles wishes the blinds to be drawn when it shines, so that it may not fade the curtains. We have few books excepting Rees's cyclopaedia, and they are kept in a glazed case. If I look at one I have to put it back directly I have done with it. I saw this place before I was married, but it did not look then as it looks now, and I did not comprehend how much Blackdeep was a part of me. The front door always open in daytime, the hollyhocks down to the gate, the strawberry beds, the currant and gooseberry bushes, the lilacs, roses, the ragged orchard at the back, the going in and out without 'getting ready', our living room with Jim's pipes and tobacco on the mantel shelf, his gun over it, his fishing tackle in the corner—I little understood that such things and the ease which is felt when our surroundings grow to us make a good part of the joy of life. When I came to Blackdeep for my holiday and lifted the latch, it was just as if a stiff, tight band round my chest dropped from me. I have nothing to do here. We keep three servants indoors. I would much rather have but two and help a little myself. They are good servants, and the work seems to go by mechanism without my interference. I suggested to Charles that, as they were not fully employed, we should get rid of one, but he would not consent. He preferred, he said, paid service. To me the dusting of my room, paring apples, or the cooking of any little delicacy, is not service. The cook asks for orders in the morning, the various dishes are properly prepared, but if I were Charles, and my wife understood her business, I should like to taste her hand in them. I never venture into the kitchen. 'The advantage of paid service', added Charles, 'is that if

it is inefficient you can reprimand or dismiss ' Nothing in me finds exercise I want to work, to laugh, to expect There was always something going on at Blackdeep, no two days alike I never got up in the morning knowing what was before me till bedtime That outlook too from my window, how I miss it '— the miles and miles of distance, the rainbow arch in summer complete to the ground, the sunlight, the stormy wind, the stars from the point overhead to the horizon far away—I hardly ever see them here

You will exclaim ' Is this all ? ' If you were here you would think it enough, but it— The clock is striking one Charles is to be at home to lunch He is going to buy the house and is to meet the owner this afternoon, an old man who lives about ten minutes' walk from us Charles thinks the purchase will be a good investment and that another house might be built on part of the garden

Blackdeep, 15 Jan 1839

I am not surprised you find London dull, but I grieve that it has taken such an effect on you I hoped that, as you are young, you would get used to the bricks and mortar and the smoke

Jim came in and I had to stop The Lynn coach is set fast in the snow near the turnpike at the top of our lane, and he is going to help dig it out I will take up my pen again You are no worse off than thousands of country girls who are obliged to live in streets narrower than those in Homerton I cannot help boding you are not quite free with me I do beseech you to hide nothing There must even now be something the matter beyond what I have heard I cannot say any more at present My head is in a whirl May be you will have a child That will make all the difference to you

Homerton, 20 Jan 1839

How shall I begin ? I must tell the whole truth Mother, mother, I have made a great mistake, the one

great mistake of life I have mistaken the man with whom I am to live Charles and I were engaged for two years I have discovered nothing new in him I was familiar with all his ways and thought them all good I compared him with other men who were extravagant and who had vices, and I considered myself fortunate He was cool, but how much better it was to be so than to have a temper, for I should never hear angry words from him which cannot be forgotten? I remembered how measured my uncle Robert's speech was, how quiet he was, and yet no two human beings could have been more devoted to one another than uncle and aunt Charles's quietude seemed so like uncle's Charles was very methodical He always came to see me on the same days, at the same hours, and stayed the same time It provoked me at first, but I said to myself that he was not a creature of fits and starts and that I could always depend on him He always kissed me when we met and when we parted I do not remember that he ever had me in his arms, and I never felt he was warm and eager when we were alone together, but I had heard of men and women who married for what they called love, and in a twelvemonth it had vanished and there was nothing left Of many small particulars I took but little notice When we chose the furniture I wanted bright-coloured curtains, but he did not like them and bought dark red, gloomy stuff I tried to think they were the best because they would not show the London dirt I had a bonnet with scarlet trimmings which suited my black hair, but he asked me to change them for something more sober, because they made me conspicuous Again I thought he was right, and that what might do for the country might not be proper in town Trifles ' and yet to me now what a meaning they have ' Two years—and everything is changed, although, as I have just said, I have found nothing new ' The quietude is absence of emotion, different in its root from



uncle Robert's serenity It is the deadly sameness of a soul to which nothing is strange and wonderful and a woman's heart is not so interesting as an advertisement column in the newspaper He never cares to look into mine I do not pretend that there is anything remarkable in it, but if he were to open it he would find something worth having This absence of curiosity to explore what is in me kills me What must the bliss of a wife be when her husband searches her to her inmost depths, when she sees tender questions in his eyes, when he asks her *do you really feel so?* and she looks at him and replies *and you?* I could endure the uneventfulness of outward life if anything not unpleasant *happened* between me and Charles Nothing happens Something happens in my relationship to my dog I pat him and he is pleased, he barks for joy when I go out I cannot live with anybody with whom I am always on exactly the same even terms—no rising, no falling, mere stagnation I am dead, but it is death without its sleep and peace Fool, fool that I was! I cannot go on What shall I do? If Charles drank I might cure or tolerate him, if he went after another woman I might win him back I can lay hold of nothing

A child? Ah no! I have longed unspeakably for a child sometimes, but not for one fathered by him

Blackdeep, 24 Jan 1839

I knew it all, but I dared not speak till you had spoken Your letter came when we were at breakfast I could not open it, for my heart told me what was in it Jim wondered why I let it lie on the table, and I made some excuse After breakfast I took it upstairs into my own room and sat down by the bed, your father's bed, and cried and prayed If he were alive he would have helped me, or if no help could have been found he would have shared my sorrow It is dreadful that, no matter what my distress may be, he cannot speak What counsel can I send you? I have

had much to do with affliction, but not such as yours  
My love for you is of no use I will be still I have  
always found, when I am in great straits and my head  
is confused, I must hold my tongue and do nothing  
If I do not move, a way may open out to me Mean-  
time, live in the thought of Blackdeep and of me It  
will do you no harm and may keep you from sinking

Homerton, 30 Jan 1839

No complaint, no reproof You might have told me  
it was perhaps my fault

I always have to reflect on what I am about to say  
to him I go through my sentences to the end before  
I open my lips He dislikes exaggeration, and checks  
me if I use a strong word, but surely life sometimes  
needs strong words, and those which are tame may be  
further from the truth than those which burn When  
he first began to think about buying the house, I was  
surprised and talked with less restraint than is usual  
with me After a little while he said that I had not con-  
tributed anything definite to a settlement of the ques-  
tion I dare say I had not, but it is natural to me to  
speak even when I do not pretend to settle questions  
He seems to think that speech is useless unless for  
a distinct, practical purpose At Blackdeep almost  
everything that comes into my head finds its way to  
my tongue The repression here is unbearable

Last night it rained, and Charles's overcoat was a  
little wet at the bottom He asked that it might be  
put to the fire Directly he came down in the morning  
he felt his coat and at breakfast said in his slow way,  
'My coat has not been dried' I replied that I was very  
sorry, that I had quite forgotten it, and that it should  
be dried before he was ready to start I jumped up,  
brought it into the room and hung it on a chair on the  
hearth rug He did not thank me and appeared to  
take no notice 'I am indeed very sorry,' I repeated  
He then spoke 'I do not care about the damp it

is the principle involved I have observed that you do not endeavour systematically to impress my requests on your mind. If you were to take due note of them at the time they are made, and say them aloud two or three times to yourself, they would not escape your memory. Forgetfulness is never an excuse in business, and I do not see why it should be at home. 'O Charles!' I cried, 'do not talk about principles in such a trifle, I simply forgot. I should be more likely to forget my cloak than your coat.' He did not answer me, but opened a couple of letters, finished his breakfast, and then began to write at the desk. I went upstairs, and when I returned to the breakfast room he had gone. In the evening he behaved as if nothing had passed between us. He would have thought it ridiculous if such a reproof had unsettled a clerk at the bank, and why should it unsettle me? The clerk expects to be taught his lesson daily. So does every rational being.

Nothing! nothing! I can imagine Mrs Perkins' contempt if I were to confide in her. 'As good a husband as ever lived. What do you want, you silly creature? I suppose it's what they call passion. You should have married a poet. You have made an uncommonly good match and ought to be thankful.' A poet! I know nothing of poets, but I do know that if marriage for passion be folly, there is no true marriage without it.

Blackdeep, 7 Feb 1839

I am no clearer now than I was a fortnight ago. I wish I could talk to somebody, and then perhaps my thoughts would settle themselves. Last Sunday I made up my mind I would come to you at all costs, then I doubted, and this morning again I was going to start at once. Now my doubts have returned. Jim notices how worried I am, and I make excuses.

I cannot rest while I am not able to do more than put you off by praying you to bear your lot patiently. It is so hard to stand helpless and counsel patience.

Could you give him up and live here ? I am held back, though, from this at present I am not sure what might happen if you were to leave him Perhaps he would be able to force you to return You have no charge to make against him which anybody but myself would understand

I must still wait for the light which I trust will be given me It is wonderful how sometimes it strikes down on me suddenly and sometimes grows by degrees like the day over Ingleby Fen I lay in bed late this morning, for I hadn't slept much, and watched it as it spread, and I thought of my Esther in London who never sees the sunrise

Homerton, 14 Feb 1839

There is hardly anything to record—no event, that is to say—and yet I have been swept on at a pace which frightens me The least word or act urges me more than a blow Yesterday I made up my accounts and was ten shillings short I went over them again and again and could not get them right I was going to put into the cash box ten shillings of my own money, but I thought there might be some mistake and that Charles, who always examines my books, would find it out, and that it would be worse for me if he had discovered what I had done than if I had let them tell their own tale After dinner he asked for them, counted my balance, and at once found out there was ten shillings too little I said I knew it and supposed I had forgotten to put down something I had spent 'Forgotten again ?' he replied, 'it is unsatisfactory there is evident want of method' He locked the box and book in the desk and read the newspaper while I sat and worked Next day I remembered the servant had half a sovereign to pay the greengrocer, and I had not seen her since I gave it to her When Charles returned from the bank my first words were, 'O Charles, I know all about the half sovereign I am so glad' Would not you have acknowledged you were glad too ? He looked at me just as he

did the night before I believe he would rather I had lost the money 'Your explanation,' was his response, 'makes no difference in fact it confirms my charge of lack of system I have brought you some tablets which I wish you to keep in your pocket, and you must note in them every outgoing at the time it is made These items are then to be regularly adjusted, and transferred afterwards' I could not restrain myself

'Charles, Charles,' I cried, 'do not *charge* me, as if I had committed a crime For mercy's sake, soften' I have confessed I was careless, can you not forgive?' 'It is much easier,' was the answer, 'to confess and regret than to amend I am not offended, and as to forgiveness I do not quite comprehend the term It is one I do not often use What is done cannot be undone If you will alter your present habit, forgiveness, whatever you may mean by it, becomes superfluous' His lips shut into their usual rigidity Not a muscle in them would have stirred if I had kissed them with tears No tears rose, I was struck into hardness equal to his own, and with something added I *hated* him 'Henceforward,' I said to myself, 'I will not submit or apologise, there shall be war'

16 Feb 1839

I left my letter unfinished War? How can I make war or continue at war? I could not keep up the struggle for a week I am so framed that I must make peace with those with whom I have disagreed or I must fly I would take nine steps out of the ten—nay, the whole ten which divide me from dear friends, I would say that this or that was not my meaning I would abandon all arguing and wash away differences with sheer affection Toward Charles I cannot stir Sometimes, although but seldom, my brother Jim and I have quarrelled Five minutes afterwards we have been in one another's arms and the angry words were as though they had never been spoken Forgiveness

is not a remission of consequences on repentance It is simply love, a love so strong that in its heat the offence vanishes Without love—and so far Charles is right—forgiveness even of the smallest mistake is impossible

It is a thick, dark fog again this morning At Black-deep most likely it is bright sunlight

Charles does not seem to suspect that his indifference has any effect on me I suppose he is unable to conceive my world or any world but his own If he were at Blackdeep now and the sun were shining, would it be to him a glowing, blessed ball of fire ?

He may have just as much right to complain of me as I have to complain of him He sets store on the qualities necessary for his business, and he knows what store the partners set on those qualities in him No doubt they are of great importance to everybody It must be hard for him to live with a woman who takes so little interest in city affairs and makes so much of what to him is of no importance He looks down upon me as though I were not able to talk on any subject which, for its comprehension, requires intelligence If he had married Miss Stagg, who has doubled the drapery business at Ely, they might have agreed together very well

This is true, but I come back to myself The virtues are not enough for me Life with them alone is not worth the trouble of getting up in the morning I thirst for you I shall come, whatever may happen

Blackdeep, 20 Feb 1839

I cannot write an answer to your letter You must come I could not make up my mind last night, but this morning the light, the direction, as my mother used to say, was like a star How you remind me of her ' not in your lot but in your ways, and she had your black hair She was a stranger to these parts Where your grandfather first saw her I do not know

but she was from the hill country in the far south west She never would hear anything against our flats When folk asked her if she did not miss the hills, she turned on them as if she had been born in the Fens and said she had found something in them better than hills But how I do wander on ' That has nothing to do with you now, although I could tell you, if it were worth while, how it came into my head I shall look out for you this week

Lombard Street, 14 Mar 1839

DEAR ESTHER,—You have now been away three weeks and I shall be glad to hear when you intend to return Your mother I hope is better, and if she is not, I trust you will see that your absence cannot be indefinitely prolonged I am writing at the Bank, and your reply marked 'Private' should be addressed here Some changes, now almost completed, are being made in the lower rooms at Homerton which will give me one for any business of my own —Your affectionate husband,  
CHARLES CRAGGS

Blackdeep, 17 Mar 1839<sup>5</sup>

DEAR CHARLES,—My mother is not well, and I shall be grateful to you if you will give me another week I am sorry you have made alterations in the house without saying anything to me It will be better now that I should not come back till they are finished —Your affectionate wife,  
ESTHER CRAGGS

Homerton, 19 Mar 1839

The paperhangers and painters have left, the carpets will be laid and the furniture arranged to day I trust to see you when I come home on the 22nd instant This will nearly give you the week you desired I shall be late at the Bank on the 22nd, but if you are fatigued with your journey there is no reason why you should not retire to rest, and we will meet in the morning.

Blackdeep, 21 Mar 1839

I had hoped for a little delay, for I shrank from the necessity of announcing my resolve, although it has for some time been fixed I shall not return. The reason for my refusal shall be given with perfect sincerity. I do not love you, and you do not love me. I ought not to have married you, and I can but plead the blindness of youth, which for you is a poor excuse. I shall be punished for the remainder of my days, and not the least part of the punishment will be that I have done you a grievous injury. Worse, however—ten thousand times worse—would it be for both of us if we were to continue chained together in apathy or hatred. I would die for you this moment to make good what you have lost through me, but to live with you as your wife would be a crime of which I dare not be guilty. This is all, and this is enough.

Homerton, 24 Mar 1839

MADAM,—I am not surprised at the contents of your letter of the 21st instant, nor am I surprised that your determination should have been made known to me from your mother's house. I have no doubt that she has done her best to inflame you against me. How she contrives to reconcile with her religion her advice to her daughter to break a divine law, I will not inquire. I am not going to remonstrate with you, I will not humiliate myself by asking you to reconsider your resolution. I will, however, remind you of one or two facts, and point out to you the consequences of your action, so that hereafter you may be unable to plead you were not forewarned.

You will please bear in mind that *you* have abandoned *me*, I have not abandoned you. You disappointed me, my house was not managed in accordance with my wishes, but I was prepared to accept the consequences of what I did deliberately and I desired to avoid open rupture. I hoped that in time you would



learn by experience that the maxims which control my conduct rest on a solid basis, that I was at least to be esteemed, and that we might live together in harmony I repeat, you have cast me off, though I was willing you should stay

You confess you have done me a wrong, but have you reflected how great that wrong is? I have no legal grounds for divorce, and you therefore prevent me from marrying again. You have damaged my position in the Bank. Many of my colleagues, envious of my success, will naturally seize their opportunity and propagate false reports, and I therefore inform you that I shall require of you a document which my solicitor will prepare, completely exonerating me. This will be necessary for my protection. A Bank manager's reputation is extremely sensitive, and a notorious infringement of any article of the moral code would in many quarters cause his commercial honesty to be suspected.

You allege that you are sincere, but I can hardly acquit you of hypocrisy. Your sentimental excuse for deserting me is suspicious.

When the document just mentioned has been signed, I shall send a copy of it to the rector of your parish. Without it he will know nothing but what you and your mother tell him, and he will be in a false position.

I hereby caution you that I shall not lose sight of you, and if at any time proof of improper relationship should be obtained, I shall take advantage of it.

CHARLES CRAGGS

Blackdeep, 26 Mar 1839

DEAREST MOTHER,—This letter came this morning, and I send it at once to you at Ely. Am I to answer it? When I read some parts I wished he had been near me that I might have caught him by the throat. I should have exulted that for once I could move him,

although it should be by terror It is strange that not until now did I know he was so brutal Notice that, according to him, if a wife leaves her husband it must be for a rival He does not understand how much she can hate him, body and soul, and with no thought of a lover, that her loathing needs no other passion to inflame it, and that the touch of his clean finger may be worse to her than a leper's embrace

When I had written so far I was afraid I knelt down and cried to our Father who is in Heaven—Your loving daughter,

ESTHER

Ely, 28 Mar 1839

You must not reply I have always tried not to answer back if it will do no good In a way, I am not sorry he has written in this style to you It proves that the leading I had was true I feared cruel claws ever since I first set eyes on him notwithstanding he was so even tempered, and I am glad he has not shown them till you are safe in Blackdeep I know what you will have to go through in time to come, but for all that I am sure I am right and that you are right I am more sure than ever I am sorry for him, but he will soon settle down and rejoice that you have gone That spiteful word about my religion does not disturb me I have my own religion I have brought up my children in it I have taught them to fear God and to love the Lord Jesus Christ, who has stood by me in all my troubles and guided me in all my straits whenever I have been willing to wait His time I bless God, my dear child, that you have not gone away from your mother's faith—ay, and your father's too—and that you can still pray to your Heavenly Father in your distress Be thankful you have been spared the worst, that you have not grown hard

I shall come back this week, your aunt wants you here, and a change will do you good

Blackdeep, 10 Apr 1839

I am glad you went to Ely, for yesterday the parson called to see you. He had received a letter from Mr Craggs, and considered it his duty as a Christian minister to endeavour to bring about a reconciliation. I told him at once he might spare himself the pains, for they would be useless. He replied that I ought to think of the example. Well, at that I broke out. I asked him whether that slut of a Quimby girl wasn't a worse example, who at five and-twenty had married Horrocks, the hoary old wretch, for his money, and leads him a dog's life? Had he ever warned either of them? They go to church regular. I was very free, and I said I thought it was a bright example that a woman should have given up a fine house and money in London because there was no love with them, and should have come back to her mother at Blackdeep. Besides, I added, why should my Esther suffer a living death for years for the sake of the folk hereabouts? They weren't worth it. She was too precious for that. 'Oh!' but he went on again, 'they have souls to be saved. Husbands and wives may be led to imagine there is no harm in separating, and may yield to the temptations of unlawful love.' This made me very hot, and I gave it him back sharp that a sinner could find in the Bible itself an excuse for his sin.

He said no more except that it would be a nice scandal for the Dissenters, and that he trusted God would bring me into a better frame of mind. He then went away. His reasoning went in at one ear and out at the other. Parsons are bound to preach by rule. It is all general. It doesn't fit the ins and outs.

Blackdeep, 1 May 1839

You had better stop at Ely as long as you can. Everybody is gossiping, for parson has told the story as he heard it from your husband. It is worse for Jim than for me, as he goes about among people here,

and although they daren't say anything to him about you, there is no mistake as to what they think Mrs Horrocks inquired after me, and said she was sorry to hear of my trouble Jim told her I was quite well, and that the two cows were now all right He wouldn't let her see he knew what she meant

Last night, Jim, who has been talking for a twelve-month past about going to his cousin in America, asked me whether I would not be willing to leave I have always set my face against it To turn my back the old house and the Fen, to begin again at my time of life in a new strange world would be the death of me More than ever now am I determined to end my days here They'd say at once we had fled No, here we'll bide and face it out

They did not fly Years went on, and to the astonishment of their neighbours—perhaps they were a little sorry—there was no sign that Esther had a lover Mrs Horrocks's eyes were feline, but she was obliged to admit she was at fault Jim married, and an agreeable opportunity was presented for the expression of amazement that his wife's father and mother felt safe in allowing their child to enter such a family—but then she came from Norwich The majority of the poor in Blackdeep Fen sided with the Suttons, and here and there a pagan farmer boldly declared that old Mrs Sutton and her daughter were of a right good sort, and that there was not a straightforrarder man than Jim in Ely market But to respectable Blackdeep society the Suttons remained a vexatious knot which it could not unpick and lay straight Nobody, as Mrs Horrocks observed, knew how to take them Mrs Craggs wore her wedding ring, and when she was in Mrs Jarvis's shop looked her straight in the face and asked for what she wanted as if she were the parson's wife But that, according to Mrs Horrocks, just showed her impudence

'What a time that poor Craggs in London must have had of it' (Mr Horrocks was not present) 'Lord! how I do pity the man' 'And yet,' added Mrs Jarvis, 'and yet, you might eat your dinner off Mrs Craggs's floor I call it hers, for she cleans it' Clearly the living room ought to have been a pigsty It was particularly annoying that, although Mrs Sutton and her family by absence from church had become infidels, they did not go to the devil openly as they ought to do, and thereby relieve Blackdeep of that pain and even hatred which are begotten by an obstinate exception to what would otherwise be a general law Parson often preached that everybody was either a sheep or a goat The Suttons were not sheep—that was certain, and yet it was difficult to classify them as ordinary Blackdeep goats, creatures with horns Mrs Jarvis had heard that there was a peculiar breed of goats with sheep's wool and without horns 'Esther Craggs,' she maintained, 'will one day show us what she's after, mark my word, you'll see If that brazen face means nothing, then I'm stone-blind'

After Jim's marriage Esther continued to manage the house and the dairy, leaving the cooking to her sister-in law and the needlework to her mother Soon after five o'clock on a bright summer morning the labourer going to his work heard the unbarring of Mrs Sutton's shutters and the withdrawal of bolts The casement windows and the door were then flung open, and Esther generally came into the doorway and for a few minutes faced the sun She did not shut herself up She walked the village like a queen, and no Fen farmer or squireling ventured to jest with her Mrs Jarvis could not be brought to admit her stone blindness and clung to the theory of somebody in London, but as Esther never went to London, and nobody from London came to her, and the postmistress swore no letters passed between London and the Sutton family, Mrs Jarvis became a little distrusted, although some

of her acquaintances believed her predictions with greater firmness as they remained unfulfilled 'I don't care what you may say, don't tell me,' was her reply to sceptical objections, and it carried great weight

Esther died of the Blackdeath fever in the fifth year after she came home As soon as he received the news of her death Mr Craggs married Mrs Perkins, who had been twelve months a widow, was admitted into partnership, and is now one of the most respected men in the City

# RICHARD GARNETT

(1835-1906)

## THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

[From *The Twilight of the Gods* 1888]

THE aged philosopher Aboniel inhabited a lofty tower in the city of Balkh, where he devoted himself to the study of chemistry and the occult sciences. No one was ever admitted to his laboratory. Yet Aboniel did not wholly shun intercourse with mankind, but, on the contrary, had seven pupils, towardly youths belonging to the noblest families of the city, whom he instructed at stated times in philosophy and all lawful knowledge, reserving the forbidden lore of magic and alchemy for himself.

But on a certain day he summoned his seven scholars to the mysterious apartment. They entered with awe and curiosity, but perceived nothing save the sage standing behind a table, on which were placed seven crystal phials, filled with a clear liquid resembling water.

'Ye know, my sons,' he began, 'with what ardour I am reputed to have striven to penetrate the hidden secrets of Nature, and to solve the problems which have allured and baffled the sages of all time. In this rumour doth not err: such hath ever been my object, but, until yesterday, my fortune hath been like unto theirs who have preceded me. The little I could accomplish seemed as nothing in comparison with what I was compelled to leave unachieved. Even now my success is but partial. I have not learned to make gold, the talisman of Solomon is not mine, nor can I recall the principle of life to the dead, or infuse it into inanimate matter. But if I cannot create, I can preserve. I have found the Elixir of Life.'

The sage paused to examine the countenances of his

scholars Upon them he read extreme surprise, undoubting belief in the veracity of their teacher, and the dawning gleam of a timid hope that they themselves might become participators in the transcendent discovery he proclaimed Addressing himself to the latter sentiment—‘I am willing,’ he continued, ‘to communicate this secret to you, if such be your desire’

A unanimous exclamation assured him that there need be no uncertainty on this point

‘But remember,’ he resumed, ‘that this knowledge, like all knowledge, has its disadvantages and its drawbacks A price must be paid, and when ye come to learn it, it may well be that it will seem too heavy Understand that the stipulations I am about to propound are not of my imposing, the secret was imparted to me by spirits not of a benevolent order, and under conditions with which I am constrained strictly to comply Understand also that I am not minded to employ this knowledge on my own behalf My fourscore years’ acquaintance with life has rendered me more solicitous for methods of abbreviating existence, than of prolonging it It may be well for you if your twenty years’ experience has led you to the same conclusion’

There was not one of the young men who would not readily have admitted, and indeed energetically maintained, the emptiness, vanity, and general unsatisfactoriness of life, for such had ever been the doctrine of their venerated preceptor Their present behaviour, however, would have convinced him, had he needed conviction, of the magnitude of the gulf between theory and practice, and the feebleness of intellectual persuasion in presence of innate instinct With one voice they protested their readiness to brave any conceivable peril, and undergo any test which might be imposed as a condition of participation in their master’s marvellous secret

‘So be it,’ returned the sage, ‘and now hearken to the conditions



‘ Each of you must select at hazard, and immediately quaff one of these seven phials, in one of which only is contained the Elixir of Life. Far different are the contents of the others, they are the six most deadly poisons which the utmost subtlety of my skill has enabled me to prepare, and science knows no antidote to any of them. The first scorches up the entrails as with fire, the second slays by freezing every vein, and benumbing every nerve, the third by frantic convulsions. Happy in comparison he who drains the fourth, for he sinks dead upon the ground immediately, smitten as it were with lightning. Nor do I overmuch commiserate him to whose lot the fifth may fall, for slumber descends upon him forthwith, and he passes away in painless oblivion. But wretched he who chooses the sixth, whose hair falls from his head, whose skin peels from his body, and who lingers long in excruciating agonies, a living death. The seventh phial contains the object of your desire. Stretch forth your hands, therefore, simultaneously to this table, let each unhesitatingly grasp and intrepidly drain the potion which fate may allot him, and be the quality of his fortune attested by the result.’

The seven disciples contemplated each other with visages of sevenfold blankness. They next unanimously directed their gaze towards their preceptor, hoping to detect some symptom of jocularly upon his venerable features. Nothing could be descried thereon but the most imperturbable solemnity, or, if perchance anything like an expression of irony lurked beneath this, it was not such irony as they wished to see. Lastly, they scanned the phials, trusting that some infinitesimal distinction might serve to discriminate the elixir from the poisons. But no, the vessels were indistinguishable in external appearance, and the contents of each were equally colourless and transparent.

‘ Well,’ demanded Aboniel at length, with real or assumed surprise, ‘ wherefore tarry ye thus? I deemed

to have ere this beheld six of you in the agonies of death!'

This utterance did not tend to encourage the seven waverers. Two of the boldest, indeed, advanced their hands half way to the table, but perceiving that their example was not followed, withdrew them in some confusion.

‘Think not, great teacher, that I personally set store by this worthless existence,’ said one of their number at last, breaking the embarrassing silence, ‘but I have an aged mother, whose life is bound up with mine’

'I,' said the second, 'have an unmarried sister, for whom it is meet that I should provide'

'I,' said the third, 'have an intimate and much-injured friend, whose cause I may in nowise forsake'

'And I an enemy upon whom I would fain be avenged,'  
said the fourth

'My life,' said the fifth, 'is wholly devoted to science. Can I consent to lay it down ere I have sounded the seas of the seven climates?'

'Or I, until I have had speech of the man in the moon?' inquired the sixth.

'I,' said the seventh, 'have neither mother nor sister, friends nor enemies, neither doth my zeal for science equal that of my fellows. But I have all the greater respect for my own skin, yea, the same is exceedingly precious in my sight.'

'The conclusion of the whole matter, then,' summed up the sage, 'is that not one of you will make a venture for the cup of immortality?'

The young men remained silent and abashed, unwilling to acknowledge the justice of their master's taunt, and unable to deny it. They sought for some middle path, which did not readily present itself.

'May we not,' said one at last, 'may we not cast lots, and each take a phial in succession, as destiny may appoint?'

'I have nothing against this,' replied Aboniel, 'only

remember that the least endeavour to contravene the conditions by amending the chance of any one of you, will ensure the discomfiture of all'

The disciples speedily procured seven quills of unequal lengths, and proceeded to draw them in the usual manner. The shortest remained in the hand of the holder, he who had pleaded his filial duty to his mother.

He approached the table with much resolution, and his hand advanced half the distance without impediment. Then, turning to the holder of the second quill, the man with the sister, he said abruptly

'The relation between mother and son is notoriously more sacred and intimate than that which obtains between brethren. Were it not therefore fitting that thou shouldst encounter the first risk in my stead?'

'The relationship between an aged mother and an adult son,' responded the youth addressed, in a sententious tone, 'albeit most holy, cannot in the nature of things be durable, seeing that it must shortly be dissolved by death. Whereas the relationship between brother and sister may endure for many years, if such be the will of Allah. It is therefore proper that thou shouldst first venture the experiment.'

'Have I lived to hear such sophistry from a pupil of the wise Abomel!' exclaimed the first speaker, in generous indignation. 'The maternal relationship—'

'A truce to this trifling,' cried the other six, 'fulfil the conditions, or abandon the task.'

Thus urged, the scholar approached his hand to the table, and seized one of the quills. Scarcely, however, had he done so, when he fancied that he detected something of a sinister colour in the liquid, which distinguished it, in his imagination, from the innocent transparency of the rest. He hastily replaced it, and laid hold of the next. At that moment a blaze of light burst forth upon them, and, thunderstruck, the seven scholars were stretched senseless on the ground.

On regaining their faculties they found themselves at

the outside of Aboniel's dwelling, stunned by the shock, and humiliated by the part they had played. They jointly pledged inviolable secrecy, and returned to their homes.

The secret of the seven was kept as well as the secret of seven can be expected to be, that is to say, it was not, ere the expiration of seven days, known to more than six sevenths of the inhabitants of Balkh. The last of these to become acquainted with it was the Sultan, who immediately dispatched his guards to apprehend the sage, and confiscate the Elixir. Failing to obtain admission at Aboniel's portal, they broke it open, and, on entering his chamber, found him in a condition which more eloquently than any profession bespoke his disdain for the life bestowing draught. He was dead in his chair. Before him, on the table, stood the seven phials, six full as previously, the seventh empty. In his hand was a scroll inscribed as follows:

'Six times twice six years have I striven after knowledge, and I now bequeath to the world the fruit of my toil, being six poisons. One more deadly I might have added, but I have refrained.

'Write upon my tomb, that here he lies who forbore to perpetuate human affliction, and bestowed a fatal boon where alone it could be innocuous.'

The intruders looked at each other, striving to penetrate the sense of Aboniel's last words.

While yet they gazed, they were startled by a loud crash from an adjacent closet, and were even more decomposed as a large monkey bounded forth, whose sleek coat, exuberant playfulness, and preternatural agility convinced all that the deceased philosopher, under an inspiration of supreme irony, had administered to the creature every drop of the Elixir of Life.

## FRANCIS BRET HARTE

(1839-1902)

[From *The Luck of Roaring Camp, etc* 1869]

### THE IDYLL OF RED GULCH

SANDY was very drunk. He was lying under an azalea bush, in pretty much the same attitude in which he had fallen some hours before. How long he had been lying there he could not tell, and didn't care, how long he should be there was a matter equally indefinite and unconsidered. A tranquil philosophy, born of his physical condition, suffused and saturated his moral being.

The spectacle of a drunken man, and of this drunken man in particular, was not, I grieve to say, of sufficient novelty in Red Gulch to attract attention. Earlier in the day some local satirist had erected a temporary tombstone at Sandy's head, bearing the inscription, 'Effects of McCorkle's whisky,—kills at forty rods,' with a hand pointing to McCorkle's saloon. But this, I imagine, was, like most local satire, personal, and was a reflection upon the unfairness of the process rather than a commentary upon the impropriety of the result. With this facetious exception, Sandy had been undisturbed. A wandering mule, released from his pack, had cropped the scant herbage beside him, and sniffed curiously at the prostrate man, a vagabond dog, with that deep sympathy which the species have for drunken men, had licked his dusty boots, and curled himself up at his feet, and lay there, blinking one eye in the sunlight, with a simulation of dissipation that was ingenious and dog like in its implied flattery of the unconscious man beside him.

Meanwhile the shadows of the pine trees had slowly swung around until they crossed the road, and their trunks barred the open meadow with gigantic parallels

of black and yellow Little puffs of red dust, lifted by the plunging hoofs of passing teams, dispersed in a grimy shower upon the recumbent man The sun sank lower and lower, and still Sandy stirred not And then the repose of this philosopher was disturbed, as other philosophers have been, by the intrusion of an unphilosophical sex

'Miss Mary,' as she was known to the little flock that she had just dismissed from the log school house beyond the pines, was taking her afternoon walk Observing an unusually fine cluster of blossoms on the azalea-bush opposite, she crossed the road to pluck it—picking her way through the red dust, not without certain fierce little shivers of disgust, and some feline circumlocution And then she came suddenly upon Sandy'

Of course she uttered the little *staccato* cry of her sex But when she had paid that tribute to her physical weakness she became overbold, and halted for a moment—at least six feet from this prostrate monster—with her white skirts gathered in her hand, ready for flight But neither sound nor motion came from the bush With one little foot she then overturned the satirical head-board, and muttered 'Beasts'—an epithet which probably, at that moment, conveniently classified in her mind the entire male population of Red Gulch For Miss Mary, being possessed of certain rigid notions of her own, had not, perhaps, properly appreciated the demonstrative gallantry for which the Californian has been so justly celebrated by his brother Californians, and had, as a new-comer, perhaps, fairly earned the reputation of being 'stuck up'

As she stood there she noticed, also, that the slant sunbeams were heating Sandy's head to what she judged to be an unhealthy temperature, and that his hat was lying uselessly at his side To pick it up and to place it over his face was a work requiring some courage, particularly as his eyes were open Yet she did it and made good her retreat But she was somewhat concerned, on

looking back, to see that the hat was removed, and that Sandy was sitting up and saying something

The truth was, that in the calm depths of Sandy's mind he was satisfied that the rays of the sun were beneficial and healthful, that from childhood he had objected to lying down in a hat, that no people but condemned fools, past redemption, ever wore hats, and that his right to dispense with them when he pleased was inalienable. This was the statement of his inner consciousness. Unfortunately, its outward expression was vague, being limited to a repetition of the following formula—'Su'shine all ri'! Wasser maär, eh? Wass up, su'shine?'

Miss Mary stopped, and, taking fresh courage from her vantage of distance, asked him if there was anything that he wanted

'Wass up? Wasser maär?' continued Sandy, in a very high key

'Get up, you horrid man!' said Miss Mary, now thoroughly incensed, 'get up, and go home'

Sandy staggered to his feet. He was six feet high, and Miss Mary trembled. He started forward a few paces and then stopped

'Wass I go home for?' he suddenly asked, with great gravity

'Go and take a bath,' replied Miss Mary, eyeing his grimy person with great disfavour

To her infinite dismay, Sandy suddenly pulled off his coat and vest, threw them on the ground, kicked off his boots, and, plunging wildly forward, darted headlong over the hill, in the direction of the river

'Goodness Heavens!—the man will be drowned!' said Miss Mary, and then, with feminine inconsistency, she ran back to the school-house, and locked herself in

That night, while seated at supper with her hostess, the blacksmith's wife, it came to Miss Mary to ask, demurely, if her husband ever got drunk. 'Abner,' responded Mrs Stidger, reflectively, 'let's see Abner

hasn't been tight since last 'lection' Miss Mary would have liked to ask if he preferred lying in the sun on these occasions, and if a cold bath would have hurt him, but this would have involved an explanation, which she did not then care to give. So she contented herself with opening her grey eyes widely at the red cheeked Mrs Stidger—a fine specimen of South western efflorescence—and then dismissed the subject altogether. The next day she wrote to her dearest friend, in Boston 'I think I find the intoxicated portion of this community the least objectionable. I refer, my dear, to the men, of course. I do not know anything that could make the women tolerable.'

In less than a week Miss Mary had forgotten this episode, except that her afternoon walks took thereafter, almost unconsciously, another direction. She noticed, however, that every morning a fresh cluster of azalea-blossoms appeared among the flowers on her desk. This was not strange, as her little flock were aware of her fondness for flowers, and invariably kept her desk bright with anemones, syringas, and lupines, but, on questioning them, they, one and all, professed ignorance of the azaleas. A few days later, Master Johnny Stidger, whose desk was nearest to the window, was suddenly taken with spasms of apparently gratuitous laughter, that threatened the discipline of the school. All that Miss Mary could get from him was, that some one had been 'looking in the winder'.irate and indignant, she sallied from her hive to do battle with the intruder. As she turned the corner of the school house she came plump upon the quondam drunkard—now perfectly sober, and unexpressibly sheepish and guilty looking.

These facts Miss Mary was not slow to take a feminine advantage of, in her present humour. But it was some what confusing to observe, also, that the beast, despite some faint signs of past dissipation, was amiable looking—in fact, a kind of blond Samson, whose corn coloured, silken beard apparently had never yet known the touch



of barber's razor or Dehlah's shears So that the cutting speech which quivered on her ready tongue died upon her lips, and she contented herself with receiving his stammering apology with supercilious eyelids and the gathered skirts of uncontamination When she re-entered the school room, her eyes fell upon the azaleas with a new sense of revelation And then she laughed, and the little people all laughed, and they were all unconsciously very happy

It was on a hot day—and not long after this—that two short legged boys came to grief on the threshold of the school with a pail of water, which they had laboriously brought from the spring, and that Miss Mary compassionately seized the pail and started for the spring herself At the foot of the hill a shadow crossed her path, and a blue shirted arm dexterously, but gently, relieved her of her burden Miss Mary was both embarrassed and angry 'If you carried more of that for yourself,' she said, spitefully, to the blue arm, without deigning to raise her lashes to its owner, 'you'd do better' In the submissive silence that followed she regretted the speech, and thanked him so sweetly at the door that he stumbled Which caused the children to laugh again—a laugh in which Miss Mary joined, until the colour came faintly into her pale cheek The next day a barrel was mysteriously placed beside the door, and as mysteriously filled with fresh spring-water every morning

Nor was this superior young person without other quiet attentions 'Profane Bill', driver of the Slumgullion Stage, widely known in the newspapers for his 'gallantry' in invariably offering the box seat to the fair sex, had excepted Miss Mary from this attention, on the ground that he had a habit of 'cussin' on up grades', and gave her half the coach to herself Jack Hamlin, a gambler, having once silently ridden with her in the same coach, afterward threw a decanter at the head of a confederate for mentioning her name in a

bar room The over dressed mother of a pupil whose paternity was doubtful had often lingered near this astute Vestal's temple, never daring to enter its sacred precincts, but content to worship the priestess from afar

With such unconscious intervals the monotonous procession of blue skies, glittering sunshine, brief twilights, and starlit nights passed over Red Gulch Miss Mary grew fond of walking in the sedate and proper woods Perhaps she believed, with Mrs Stidger, that the balsamic odours of the firs 'did her chest good', for certainly her slight cough was less frequent and her step was firmer, perhaps she had learned the unending lesson which the patient pines are never weary of repeating to heedful or listless ears And so, one day, she planned a picnic on Buckeye Hill, and took the children with her Away from the dusty road, the straggling shanties, the yellow ditches, the clamour of restless engines, the cheap finery of shop-windows, the deeper glitter of paint and coloured glass, and the thin veneering which barbarism takes upon itself in such localities—what infinite relief was theirs! The last heap of ragged rock and clay passed, the last unsightly chasm crossed—how the waiting woods opened their long files to receive them! How the children—perhaps because they had not yet grown quite away from the breast of the bounteous Mother—threw themselves face downward on her brown bosom with uncouth caresses, filling the air with their laughter, and how Miss Mary herself—felinely fastidious and intrenched as she was in the purity of spotless skirts, collar, and cuffs—forgot all, and ran like a crested quail at the head of her brood, until, romping, laughing, and panting, with a loosened braid of brown hair, a hat hanging by a knotted ribbon from her throat, she came suddenly and violently, in the heart of the forest, upon—the luckless Sandy!

The explanations, apologies, and not otherwise conversation that ensued, need not be indicated here It

would seem, however, that Miss Mary had already established some acquaintance with this ex drunkard. Enough that he was soon accepted as one of the party, that the children, with that quick intelligence which Providence gives the helpless, recognized a friend, and played with his blond beard, and long silken moustache, and took other liberties—as the helpless are apt to do. And when he had built a fire against a tree, and had shown them other mysteries of wood craft, their admiration knew no bounds. At the close of two such foolish, idle, happy hours he found himself lying at the feet of the schoolmistress, gazing dreamily in her face, as she sat upon the sloping hill side, weaving wreaths of laurel and syringa, in very much the same attitude as he had lain when first they met. Nor was the similitude greatly forced. The weakness of an easy, sensuous nature, that had found a dreamy exaltation in liquor, it is to be feared was now finding an equal intoxication in love.

I think that Sandy was dimly conscious of this himself. I know that he longed to be doing something—slaying a grizzly, scalping a savage, or sacrificing himself in some way for the sake of this sallow faced, grey eyed schoolmistress. As I should like to present him in a heroic attitude, I stay my hand with great difficulty at this moment, being only withheld from introducing such an episode by a strong conviction that it does not usually occur at such times. And I trust that my fairest reader, who remembers that, in a real crisis, it is always some uninteresting stranger or unromantic policeman, and not Adolphus, who rescues, will forgive the omission.

So they sat there, undisturbed—the woodpeckers chattering overhead, and the voices of the children coming pleasantly from the hollow below. What they said matters little. What they thought—which might have been interesting—did not transpire. The woodpeckers only learned how Miss Mary was an orphan, how she left her uncle's house, to come to California, for the sake of health and independence, how Sandy

was an orphan, too, how he came to California for excitement, how he had lived a wild life, and how he was trying to reform, and other details, which, from a woodpecker's view point, undoubtedly must have seemed stupid, and a waste of time. But even in such trifles was the afternoon spent, and when the children were again gathered, and Sandy, with a delicacy which the schoolmistress well understood, took leave of them quietly at the outskirts of the settlement, it had seemed the shortest day of her weary life.

As the long, dry summer withered to its roots, the school term of Red Gulch—to use a local euphuism—‘dried up’ also. In another day Miss Mary would be free, and for a season, at least, Red Gulch would know her no more. She was seated alone in the school-house, her cheek resting on her hand, her eyes half closed in one of those day dreams in which Miss Mary—I fear, to the danger of school discipline—was lately in the habit of indulging. Her lap was full of mosses, ferns, and other woodland memories. She was so pre-occupied with these and her own thoughts that a gentle tapping at the door passed unheard, or translated itself into the remembrance of far off woodpeckers. When at last it asserted itself more distinctly, she started up with a flushed cheek and opened the door. On the threshold stood a woman, the self assertion and audacity of whose dress were in singular contrast to her timid, irresolute bearing.

Miss Mary recognized at a glance the dubious mother of her anonymous pupil. Perhaps she was disappointed, perhaps she was only fastidious, but as she coldly invited her to enter, she half unconsciously settled her white cuffs and collar, and gathered closer her own chaste skirts. It was, perhaps, for this reason that the embarrassed stranger, after a moment's hesitation, left her gorgeous parasol open and sticking in the dust beside the door, and then sat down at the farther end of a long bench. Her voice was husky as she began—

'I heerd tell that you were goin' down to the Bay to-morrow, and I couldn't let you go until I came to thank you for your kindness to my Tommy'

Tommy, Miss Mary said, was a good boy, and deserved more than the poor attention she could give him

'Thank you, miss, thank ye!' cried the stranger, brightening even through the colour which Red Gulch knew facetiously as her 'war paint', and striving, in her embarrassment, to drag the long bench nearer the schoolmistress 'I thank you, miss, for that' and if I am his mother, there ain't a sweeter, dearer, better boy lives than him And if I ain't much as says it, thar ain't a sweeter, dearer, angeler teacher lives than he's got'

Miss Mary, sitting primly behind her desk, with a ruler over her shoulder, opened her grey eyes widely at this, but said nothing

'It ain't for you to be complimented by the like of me, I know,' she went on, hurriedly 'It ain't for me to be comin' here, in broad day, to do it, either, but I come to ask a favour—not for me, miss—not for me, but for the darling boy'

Encouraged by a look in the young schoolmistress's eye, and putting her lilac gloved hands together, the fingers downward, between her knees, she went on, in a low voice—

'You see, miss, there's no one the boy has any claim on but me, and I ain't the proper person to bring him up I thought some, last year, of sending him away to 'Frisco to school, but when they talked of bringing a schoolma'am here, I waited till I saw you, and then I knew it was all right, and I could keep my boy a little longer And O, miss, he loves you so much, and if you could hear him talk about you, in his pretty way, and if he could ask you what I ask you now, you couldn't refuse him

'It is natural,' she went on rapidly, in a voice that trembled strangely between pride and humility—'it's

natural that he should take to you, miss, for his father, when I first knew him, was a gentleman—and the boy must forget me, sooner or later—and so I an't a goin' to cry about that For I come to ask you to take my Tommy—God bless him for the bestest, sweetest boy that lives '—to—to—take him with you '

She had risen and caught the young girl's hand in her own, and had fallen on her knees beside her

' I've money plenty, and it 's all yours and his Put him in some good school, where you can go and see him, and help him to—to—to forget his mother Do with him what you like The worst you can do will be kindness to what he will learn with me Only take him out of this wicked life, this cruel place, this home of shame and sorrow You will, I know you will—won't you ? You will—you must not, you cannot say no ' You will make him as pure, as gentle as yourself, and when he has grown up, you will tell him his father's name—the name that hasn't passed my lips for years—the name of Alexander Morton, whom they call here Sandy ' Miss Mary '—do not take your hand away ' Miss Mary, speak to me ' You will take my boy ? Do not put your face from me I know it ought not to look on such as me Miss Mary '—my God, be merciful '—she is leaving me ' '

Miss Mary had risen, and, in the gathering twilight, had felt her way to the open window She stood there, leaning against the casement, her eyes fixed on the last rosy tints that were fading from the western sky There was still some of its light on her pure young forehead, on her white collar, on her clasped white hands, but all fading slowly away The suppliant had dragged herself, still on her knees, beside her

' I know it takes time to consider I will wait here all night, but I cannot go until you speak Do not deny me now You will '—I see it in your sweet face—such a face as I have seen in my dreams I see it in your eyes, Miss Mary '—you will take my boy ! '

The last red beam crept higher, suffused Miss Mary's eyes with something of its glory, flickered, and faded, and went out. The sun had set on Red Gulch. In the twilight and silence Miss Mary's voice sounded pleasantly.

'I will take the boy. Send him to me to night.'

The happy mother raised the hem of Miss Mary's skirts to her lips. She would have burned her hot face in its virgin folds, but she dared not. She rose to her feet.

'Does—this man—know of your intention?' asked Miss Mary, suddenly.

'No, nor cares. He has never even seen the child to know it.'

'Go to him at once—to-night—now! Tell him what you have done. Tell him I have taken his child, and tell him—he must never see—see—the child again. Wherever it may be, he must not come, wherever I may take it, he must not follow! There, go now, please—I'm weary, and—have much yet to do!'

They walked together to the door. On the threshold the woman turned.

'Good night.'

She would have fallen at Miss Mary's feet. But at the same moment the young girl reached out her arms, caught the sinful woman to her own pure breast for one brief moment, and then closed and locked the door.

It was with a sudden sense of great responsibility that Profane Bill took the reins of the Slumgullion Stage the next morning, for the schoolmistress was one of his passengers. As he entered the high road, in obedience to a pleasant voice from the 'inside', he suddenly reined up his horses and respectfully waited, as 'Tommy' hopped out at the command of Miss Mary.

'Not that bush, Tommy—the next.'

Tommy whipped out his new pocket knife, and,

cutting a branch from a tall azalea-bush, returned with it to Miss Mary

‘ All right now ? ’

‘ All right ’

And the stage door closed on the Idyll of Red Gulch

## MR. THOMPSON'S PRODIGAL

WE all knew that Mr Thompson was looking for his son, and a pretty bad one at that. That he was coming to California for this sole object was no secret to his fellow passengers, and the physical peculiarities, as well as the moral weaknesses, of the missing prodigal were made equally plain to us through the frank volubility of the parent. ‘ You was speaking of a young man which was hung at Red Dog for sluice robbing,’ said Mr Thompson to a steerage passenger one day, ‘ be you aware of the colour of his eyes ? ’ ‘ Black,’ responded the passenger. ‘ Ah ! ’ said Mr Thompson, referring to some mental memoranda, ‘ Charles’s eyes was blue.’ He then walked away. Perhaps it was from this unsympathetic mode of inquiry, perhaps it was from that Western predilection to take a humorous view of any principle or sentiment persistently brought before them, that Mr Thompson’s quest was the subject of some satire among the passengers. A gratuitous advertisement of the missing Charles, addressed to ‘ Jailers and Guardians,’ circulated privately among them, everybody remembered to have met Charles under distressing circumstances. Yet it is but due to my countrymen to state that when it was known that Thompson had embarked some wealth in this visionary project, but little of this satire found its way to his ears, and nothing was uttered in his hearing that might bring a pang to a father’s heart, or imperil a possible pecuniary advantage of the satirist. Indeed, Mr Bracy Tibbets’s



jocular proposition to form a joint-stock company to 'prospect' for the missing youth received at one time quite serious entertainment

Perhaps to superficial criticism Mr Thompson's nature was not picturesque nor lovable His history, as imparted at dinner one day by himself, was practical even in its singularity After a hard and wilful youth and maturity, in which he had buried a broken spirited wife and driven his son to sea, he suddenly experienced religion 'I got it in New Orleans in '59,' said Mr Thompson, with the general suggestion of referring to an epidemic 'Enter ye the narrer gate Parse me the beans' Perhaps this practical quality upheld him in his apparently hopeless search He had no clue to the whereabouts of his runaway son, indeed, scarcely a proof of his present existence From his indifferent recollection of the boy of twelve, he now expected to identify the man of twenty five

It would seem that he was successful How he succeeded was one of the few things he did not tell There are, I believe, two versions of the story One, that Mr Thompson, visiting a hospital, discovered his son by reason of a peculiar hymn, chanted by the sufferer in a delirious dream of his boyhood This version, giving as it did wide range to the finer feelings of the heart, was quite popular, and as told by the Rev Mr Gushington on his return from his California tour, never failed to satisfy an audience The other was less simple, and, as I shall adopt it here, deserves more elaboration

It was after Mr Thompson had given up searching for his son among the living, and had taken to the examination of cemeteries and a careful inspection of the 'cold *hic jacets* of the dead' At this time he was a frequent visitor of 'Lone Mountain', a dreary hill-top, bleak enough in its original isolation, and bleaker for the white faced marbles by which San Francisco anchored her departed citizens, and kept them down in a shifting sand that refused to cover them, and against a fierce and

persistent wind that strove to blow them utterly away. Against this wind the old man opposed a will quite as persistent, a grizzled hard face, and a tall crape-bound hat drawn tightly over his eyes—and so spent days in reading the mortuary inscriptions audibly to himself. The frequency of Scriptural quotation pleased him, and he was fond of corroborating them by a pocket Bible. 'That's from Psalms,' he said one day to an adjacent gravedigger. The man made no reply. Not at all rebuffed, Mr Thompson at once slid down into the open grave with a more practical inquiry, 'Did you ever, in your profession, come across Charles Thompson?' 'Thompson be d—d!' said the gravedigger, with great directness. 'Which, if he hadn't religion, I think he is,' responded the old man, as he clambered out of the grave.

It was perhaps on this occasion that Mr Thompson stayed later than usual. As he turned his face toward the city, lights were beginning to twinkle ahead, and a fierce wind, made visible by fog, drove him forward, or, lying in wait, charged him angrily from the corners of deserted suburban streets. It was on one of these corners that something else, quite as indistinct and malevolent, leaped upon him with an oath, a presented pistol, and a demand for money. But it was met by a will of iron and a grip of steel. The assailant and assailed rolled together on the ground. But the next moment the old man was erect, one hand grasping the captured pistol, the other clutching at arm's length the throat of a figure, surly, youthful, and savage.

'Young man,' said Mr Thompson, setting his thin lips together, 'what might be your name?'

'Thompson!'

The old man's hand slid from the throat to the arm of his prisoner, without relaxing its firmness.

'Charles Thompson, come with me,' he said presently, and marched his captive to the hotel. What took place there has not transpired, but it was known the next morning that Mr Thompson had found his son.

It is proper to add to the above improbable story, that there was nothing in the young man's appearance or manners to justify it. Grave, reticent, and handsome, devoted to his newly found parent, he assumed the emoluments and responsibilities of his new condition with a certain serious ease that more nearly approached that which San Francisco society lacked and—rejected. Some chose to despise this quality as a tendency to 'psalm singing', others saw in it the inherited qualities of the parent, and were ready to prophesy for the son the same hard old age. But all agreed that it was not inconsistent with the habits of money-getting for which father and son were respected.

And yet the old man did not seem to be happy. Perhaps it was that the consummation of his wishes left him without a practical mission, perhaps—and it is the more probable—he had little love for the son he had regained. The obedience he exacted was freely given, the reform he had set his heart upon was complete, and yet somehow it did not seem to please him. In reclaiming his son he had fulfilled all the requirements that his religious duty required of him, and yet the act seemed to lack sanctification. In this perplexity he read again the parable of the Prodigal Son, which he had long ago adopted for his guidance, and found that he had omitted the final feast of reconciliation. This seemed to offer the proper quality of ceremoniousness in the sacrament between himself and his son, and so, a year after the appearance of Charles, he set about giving him a party. 'Invite everybody, Charles,' he said dryly, 'everybody who knows that I brought you out of the wine husks of iniquity and the company of harlots, and bid them eat, drink, and be merry.'

Perhaps the old man had another reason, not yet clearly analysed. The fine house he had built on the sandhills sometimes seemed lonely and bare. He often found himself trying to reconstruct, from the grave features of Charles, the little boy whom he but dimly

remembered in the past, and of whom lately he had been thinking a great deal. He believed this to be a sign of impending old age and childishness, but coming one day, in his formal drawing room, upon a child of one of the servants, who had strayed therein, he would have taken him in his arms, but the child fled from before his grizzled face. So that it seemed eminently proper to invite a number of people to his house, and, from the array of San Francisco maidenhood, to select a daughter in law. And then there would be a child—a boy, whom he could 'rare up' from the beginning, and—love—as he did not love Charles.

We were all at the party. The Smiths, Joneses, Browns, and Robinsons also came, in that fine flow of animal spirits, unchecked by any respect for the entertainer, which most of us are apt to find so fascinating. The proceedings would have been somewhat riotous but for the social position of the actors. In fact, Mr Bracy Tibbets, having naturally a fine appreciation of a humorous situation, but further impelled by the bright eyes of the Jones girls, conducted himself so remarkably as to attract the serious regard of Mr Charles Thompson, who approached him, saying quietly, 'You look ill, Mr Tibbets, let me conduct you to your carriage. Resist, you hound, and I'll throw you through that window. This way, please, the room is close and distressing.' It is hardly necessary to say that but a part of this speech was audible to the company, and that the rest was not divulged by Mr Tibbets, who afterward regretted the sudden illness which kept him from witnessing a certain amusing incident, which the fastest Miss Jones characterized as the 'richest part of the blow out', and which I hasten to record.

It was at supper. It was evident that Mr Thompson had overlooked much lawlessness in the conduct of the younger people, in his abstract contemplation of some impending event. When the cloth was removed, he rose to his feet and grimly tapped upon the table. A titter,

that broke out among the Jones girls, became epidemic on one side of the board Charles Thompson, from the foot of the table, looked up in tender perplexity 'He's going to sing a Doxology,' 'He's going to pray,' 'Silence for a speech,' ran round the room

'It's one year to day, Christian brothers and sisters,' said Mr Thompson with grim deliberation—'one year to day since my son came home from eating of wine husks and spending of his substance on harlots' (The tittering suddenly ceased) 'Look at him now Charles Thompson, stand up' (Charles Thompson stood up) 'One year ago to day—and look at him now'

He was certainly a handsome prodigal, standing there in his cheerful evening dress—a repentant prodigal, with sad obedient eyes turned upon the harsh and unsympathetic glance of his father The youngest Miss Smith, from the pure depths of her foolish little heart, moved unconsciously toward him

'It's fifteen years ago since he left my house,' said Mr Thompson, 'a rover and a prodigal I was myself a man of sin, O Christian friends—a man of wrath and bitterness' ('Amen,' from the eldest Miss Smith)—'but praise be God, I've fled the wrath to come It's five years ago since I got the peace that passeth understanding Have you got it, friends?' (A general sub chorus of 'No, no,' from the girls, and, 'Pass the word for it,' from Midshipman Coxe, of the U S sloop *Wethersfield*) 'Knock, and it shall be opened to you'

'And when I found the error of my ways, and the preciousness of grace,' continued Mr Thompson, 'I came to give it to my son By sea and land I sought him far, and fainted not I did not wait for him to come to me, which the same I might have done, and justified myself by the Book of books, but I sought him out among his husks, and—' (the rest of the sentence was lost in the rustling withdrawal of the ladies), 'Works, Christian friends, is my motto By their works shall ye know them and there is mine'

The particular and accepted work to which Mr Thompson was alluding had turned quite pale, and was looking fixedly toward an open door leading to the veranda, lately filled by gaping servants, and now the scene of some vague tumult. As the noise continued, a man, shabbily dressed and evidently in liquor, broke through the opposing guardians, and staggered into the room. The transition from the fog and darkness without to the glare and heat within evidently dazzled and stupefied him. He removed his battered hat, and passed it once or twice before his eyes, as he steadied himself, but unsuccessfully, by the back of a chair. Suddenly his wandering glance fell upon the pale face of Charles Thompson, and with a gleam of childlike recognition, and a weak falsetto laugh, he darted forward, caught at the table, upset the glasses, and literally fell upon the prodigal's breast.

'Sha'ly' yo' d—d ol' scoun'rel, hoo rar ye!'

'Hush!—sit down!—hush!' said Charles Thompson, hurriedly endeavouring to extricate himself from the embrace of his unexpected guest.

'Look at 'm'!' continued the stranger, unheeding the admonition, but suddenly holding the unfortunate Charles at arm's length, in loving and undisguised admiration of his festive appearance. 'Look at 'm'! Ain't he nasty? Sha'ls, I'm prow of yer!'

'Leave the house!' said Mr Thompson, rising, with a dangerous look in his cold grey eye. 'Char-les, how dare you?'

'Simmer down, ole man! Sha'ls, who's th' ol' bloat? Eh?'

'Hush, man, here, take this!' With nervous hands, Charles Thompson filled a glass with liquor. 'Drink it and go—until to morrow—any time, but—leave us!—go now!' But even then, ere the miserable wretch could drink, the old man, pale with passion, was upon him. Half carrying him in his powerful arms, half dragging him through the circling crowd of frightened

guests, he had reached the door, swung open by the waiting servants, when Charles Thompson started from a seeming stupor, crying—

‘Stop!’

The old man stopped. Through the open door the fog and wind drove chilly. ‘What does this mean?’ he asked, turning a baleful face on Charles.

‘Nothing—but stop—for God’s sake. Wait till to-morrow, but not to-night. Do not, I implore you—do this thing.’

There was something in the tone of the young man’s voice, something, perhaps, in the contact of the struggling wretch he held in his powerful arms, but a dim, indefinite fear took possession of the old man’s heart. ‘Who,’ he whispered hoarsely, ‘is this man?’

Charles did not answer.

‘Stand back, there, all of you,’ thundered Mr Thompson, to the crowding guests around him. ‘Charles—come here!’ I command you—I—I—I—beg you—tell me *who* is this man?’

Only two persons heard the answer that came faintly from the lips of Charles Thompson—

‘YOUR SON’

When day broke over the bleak sandhills, the guests had departed from Mr Thompson’s banquet halls. The lights still burned dimly and coldly in the deserted rooms—deserted by all but three figures, that huddled together in the chill drawing room, as if for warmth. One lay in drunken slumber on a couch, at his feet sat he who had been known as Charles Thompson, and beside them, haggard and shrunk to half his size, bowed the figure of Mr Thompson, his grey eye fixed, his elbows upon his knees, and his hands clasped over his ears, as if to shut out the sad, entreating voice that seemed to fill the room.

‘God knows I did not set about to wilfully deceive. The name I gave that night was the first that came into my thought—the name of one whom I thought dead—

the dissolute companion of my shame And when you questioned further, I used the knowledge that I gained from him to touch your heart to set me free, only, I swear, for that ! But when you told me who you were, and I first saw the opening of another life before me—then—then— O, sir, if I was hungry, homeless, and reckless, when I would have robbed you of your gold, I was heartsick, helpless, and desperate, when I would have robbed you of your love ! ’

The old man stirred not From his luxurious couch the newly found prodigal snored peacefully

‘ I had no father I could claim I never knew a home but this I was tempted I have been happy—very happy ’

He rose and stood before the old man

‘ Do not fear that I shall come between your son and his inheritance To day I leave this place, never to return The world is large, sir, and, thanks to your kindness, I now see the way by which an honest livelihood is gained Good bye You will not take my hand ? Well, well ! Good bye ’

He turned to go But when he had reached the door he suddenly came back, and, raising with both hands the grizzled head, he kissed it once and twice

‘ Char les ! ’

There was no reply

‘ Char les ! ’

The old man rose with a frightened air, and tottered feebly to the door It was open There came to him the awakened tumult of a great city, in which the prodigal’s footsteps were lost for ever



# AMBROSE BIERCE

(1842-1913?)

## AN OCCURRENCE AT OWL CREEK BRIDGE

[From *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* 1891]

### I

A MAN stood upon a railroad bridge in Northern Alabama, looking down into the swift waters twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope loosely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross timber above his head, and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the sleepers supporting the metals of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners—two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant, who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as 'support', that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest—a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the centre of the bridge, they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot plank which traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight, the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost further along. The other bank of the stream was open ground—a gentle acclivity crowned with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loop holed for

## AN OCCURRENCE AT OWL CREEK BRIDGE 311

rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway of the slope between bridge and fort were the spectators—a single company of infantry in line, at 'parade rest', the butts of the rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the centre of the bridge not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates but making no sign. Death is a dignitary who, when he comes announced, is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty five years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge by his dress, which was that of a planter. His features were good—a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well fitting frock coat. He wore a moustache and pointed beard, but no whiskers, his eyes were large and dark grey and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of people, and gentlemen are not excluded.

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately

behind that officer, who in turn moved apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the cross ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain, it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former, the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgement as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his 'unsteadfast footing', then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil, it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or near by—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer, the delays became maddening. With their great infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife, he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him 'If I could free my hands,' he thought, 'I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream By diving I could evade the bullets, and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods, and get away home My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines, my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader's farthest advance'

As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it, the captain nodded to the sergeant The sergeant stepped aside

## II

Peyton Farquhar was a well to do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family Being a slave owner, and, like other slave owners, a politician, he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause Circumstances of an imperious nature which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with the gallant army which had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in war time Meanwhile he did what he could No service was too humble for him to perform in aid of the South, no adventure too perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a grey clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water Mrs Farquhar was only too happy to

serve him with her own white hands While she was gone to fetch the water, her husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front

'The Yanks are repairing the railroads,' said the man, 'and are getting ready for another advance They have reached the Owl Creek bridge, put it in order, and built a stockade on the other bank The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels, or trains will be summarily hanged I saw the order'

'How far is it to the Owl Creek bridge?' Farquhar asked

'About thirty miles'

'Is there no force on this side of the creek?'

'Only a picket post half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge'

'Suppose a man—a civilian and student of hanging—should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel,' said Farquhar, smiling, 'what could he accomplish?'

The soldier reflected 'I was there a month ago,' he replied 'I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge It is now dry and would burn like tow'

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband, and rode away An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come He was a Federal scout

### III

As Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge, he lost consciousness and was as one already dead From this state he was awakened—ages later,

it seemed to him—by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fibre of his body and limbs. These pains appeared to flash along well-defined lines of ramification, and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fullness—of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced, he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud splash, a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored, he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation, the noose about his neck was already suffocating him, and kept the water from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river!—the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the blackness and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew that he was rising toward the surface—knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. ‘To be hanged and drowned,’ he thought, ‘that is not so bad, but I do not wish to be shot. No, I will not be shot, that is not fair.’

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrists apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler

might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome. What splendid effort!—what magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine endeavour! Bravo! The cord fell away, his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water snake. 'Put it back, put it back!' He thought he shouted these words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst pang which he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly, his brain was on fire, his heart, which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out at his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish! But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge, his eyes were blinded by the sunlight, his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek!

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them, the locusts, the brilliant bodied flies, the grey spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colours in all the dewdrops upon the million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the

dragon flies' wings, the strokes of the water spiders' legs, like oars which had lifted their boat—all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down the stream, in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him, the captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire, the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a grey eye, and remembered having read that grey eyes were keenest, and that all famous marksmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round, he was again looking into the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous singsong now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawing, aspirated chant, the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning's work. How coldly and pitilessly—with what an even, calm intonation, presaging and enforcing tran-



quility in the men—with what accurately measured intervals fell those cruel words

‘Attention, company                      Shoulder arms  
Ready                      Aim                      Fire’

Farquhar dived—dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dulled thunder of the volley, and rising again toward the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck, it was uncomfortably warm, and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water, he was perceptibly farther down stream—nearer to safety. The soldiers had almost finished reloading, the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder, ‘he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs, he thought with the rapidity of lightning.

‘The officer,’ he reasoned, ‘will not make that martinet’s error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!’

An appalling splash within two yards of him, followed by a loud rushing sound, *diminuendo*, which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its depths! A rising sheet of water, which curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him! The cannon had taken a hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water, he heard

the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond

'They will not do that again,' he thought, 'the next time they will use a charge of grape I must keep my eye upon the gun, the smoke will apprise me—the report arrives too late, it lags behind the missile It is a good gun'

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round—spinning like a top The water, the banks, the forest, the now distant bridge, fort and men—all were commingled and blurred Objects were represented by their colours only, circular horizontal streaks of colour—that was all he saw He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration which made him giddy and sick In a few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream—the southern bank—and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him and he wept with delight He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it It looked like gold, like diamonds, rubies, emeralds, he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants, he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks, and the wind made in their branches the music of æolian harps He had no wish to perfect his escape, was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken

A whizz and rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream The baffled cannoneer had fired him a random farewell He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest

All that day he travelled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable, no where did he discover a break in it, not even a wood man's road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famishing. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untravelled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the great trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises, among which—once, twice, and again—he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

His neck was in pain, and, lifting his hand to it, he found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested, he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst, he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cool air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untravelled avenue! He could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he fell asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene—perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have travelled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate

and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments, his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the verandah to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forward with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her, he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck, a blinding white light blazes all about him, with a sound like the shock of a cannon—then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead, his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.

# HENRY JAMES

(1843-1916)

## THE MIDDLE YEARS

[From *Terminations* 1895]

### I

THE April day was soft and bright, and poor Dencombe, happy in the conceit of reasserted strength, stood in the garden of the hotel, comparing, with a deliberation in which, however, there was still some thing of languor, the attractions of easy strolls. He liked the feeling of the south, so far as you could have it in the north, he liked the sandy cliffs and the clustered pines, he liked even the colourless sea. 'Bournemouth as a health-resort' had sounded like a mere advertisement, but now he was reconciled to the prosaic. The sociable country postman, passing through the garden, had just given him a small parcel, which he took out with him, leaving the hotel to the right and creeping to a convenient bench that he knew of, a safe recess in the cliff. It looked to the south, to the tinted walls of the Island, and was protected behind by the sloping shoulder of the down. He was tired enough when he reached it, and for a moment he was disappointed, he was better, of course, but better, after all, than what? He should never again, as at one or two great moments of the past, be better than himself. The infinite of life had gone, and what was left of the dose was a small glass engraved like a thermometer by the apothecary. He sat and stared at the sea, which appeared all surface and twinkle, far shallower than the spirit of man. It was the abyss of human illusion that was the real, the tideless deep. He held his packet, which had come by book-post, unopened on his knee, liking, in the lapse

of so many joys (his illness had made him feel his age), to know that it was there, but taking for granted there could be no complete renewal of the pleasure, dear to young experience, of seeing one's self 'just out' Dencombe, who had a reputation, had come out too often and knew too well in advance how he should look

His postponement associated itself vaguely, after a little, with a group of three persons, two ladies and a young man, whom, beneath him, straggling and seemingly silent, he could see move slowly together along the sands. The gentleman had his head bent over a book and was occasionally brought to a stop by the charm of this volume, which, as Dencombe could perceive even at a distance, had a cover alluringly red. Then his companions, going a little further, waited for him to come up, poking their parasols into the beach, looking around them at the sea and sky and clearly sensible of the beauty of the day. To these things the young man with the book was still more clearly indifferent, lingering, credulous, absorbed, he was an object of envy to an observer from whose connexion with literature all such artlessness had faded. One of the ladies was large and mature, the other had the spareness of comparative youth and of a social situation possibly inferior. The large lady carried back Dencombe's imagination to the age of crinoline, she wore a hat of the shape of a mushroom, decorated with a blue veil, and had the air, in her aggressive amplitude, of clinging to a vanished fashion or even a lost cause. Presently her companion produced from under the folds of a mantle a limp, portable chair which she stiffened out and of which the large lady took possession. This act, and something in the movement of either party, instantly characterized the performers—they performed for Dencombe's recreation—as opulent matron and humble dependant. What, moreover, was the use of being an approved novelist if one couldn't establish a relation between such figures, the clever

theory, for instance, that the young man was the son of the opulent matron, and that the humble dependant, the daughter of a clergyman or an officer, nourished a secret passion for him? Was that not visible from the way she stole behind her protectress to look back at him?—back to where he had let himself come to a full stop when his mother sat down to rest. His book was a novel, it had the catchpenny cover, and while the romance of life stood neglected at his side he lost himself in that of the circulating library. He moved mechanically to where the sand was softer, and ended by plumping down in it to finish his chapter at his ease. The humble dependant, discouraged by his remoteness, wandered, with a martyred droop of the head, in another direction, and the exorbitant lady, watching the waves, offered a confused resemblance to a flying machine that had broken down.

When his drama began to fail Dencombe remembered that he had, after all, another pastime. Though such promptitude on the part of the publisher was rare, he was already able to draw from its wrapper his 'latest', perhaps his last. The cover of 'The Middle Years' was duly meretricious, the smell of the fresh pages the very odour of sanctity, but for the moment he went no further—he had become conscious of a strange alienation. He had forgotten what his book was about. Had the assault of his old ailment, which he had so fallaciously come to Bournemouth to ward off, interposed utter blankness as to what had preceded it? He had finished the revision of proof before quitting London, but his subsequent fortnight in bed had passed the sponge over colour. He couldn't have chanted to himself a single sentence, couldn't have turned with curiosity or confidence to any particular page. His subject had already gone from him, leaving scarcely a superstition behind. He uttered a low moan as he breathed the chill of this dark void, so desperately it seemed to represent the completion of a sinister

process The tears filled his mild eyes, something precious had passed away This was the pang that had been sharpest during the last few years—the sense of ebbing time, of shrinking opportunity, and now he felt not so much that his last chance was going as that it was gone indeed He had done all that he should ever do, and yet he had not done what he wanted This was the laceration—that practically his career was over it was as violent as a rough hand at his throat He rose from his seat nervously, like a creature hunted by a dread, then he fell back in his weakness and nervously opened his book It was a single volume, he preferred single volumes and aimed at a rare compression He began to read, and little by little, in this occupation, he was pacified and reassured Everything came back to him, but came back with a wonder, came back, above all, with a high and magnificent beauty He read his own prose, he turned his own leaves, and had, as he sat there with the spring sunshine on the page, an emotion peculiar and intense His career was over, no doubt, but it was over, after all, with *that*

He had forgotten during his illness the work of the previous year, but what he had chiefly forgotten was that it was extraordinarily good He lived once more into his story and was drawn down, as by a siren's hand, to where, in the dim underworld of fiction, the great glazed tank of art, strange silent subjects float He recognized his motive and surrendered to his talent Never, probably, had that talent, such as it was, been so fine His difficulties were still there, but what was also there, to his perception, though probably, alas! to nobody's else, was the art that in most cases had surmounted them In his surprised enjoyment of this ability he had a glimpse of a possible reprieve Surely its force was not spent—there was life and service in it yet It had not come to him easily, it had been backward and roundabout It was the child of time, the



nursling of delay, he had struggled and suffered for it, making sacrifices not to be counted, and now that it was really mature was it to cease to yield, to confess itself brutally beaten? There was an infinite charm for Dencombe in feeling as he had never felt before that diligence *vincit omnia*. The result produced in his little book was somehow a result beyond his conscious intention—it was as if he had planted his genius, had trusted his method, and they had grown up and flowered with this sweetness. If the achievement had been real, however, the process had been manful enough. What he saw so intensely to-day, what he felt as a nail driven in, was that only now, at the very last, had he come into possession. His development had been abnormally slow, almost grotesquely gradual. He had been hindered and retarded by experience, and for long periods had only groped his way. It had taken too much of his life to produce too little of his art. The art had come, but it had come after everything else. At such a rate a first existence was too short—long enough only to collect material, so that to fructify, to use the material, one must have a second age, an extension. This extension was what poor Dencombe sighed for. As he turned the last leaves of his volume he murmured 'Ah for another go!—ah for a better chance!'

The three persons he had observed on the sands had vanished and then reappeared, they had now wandered up a path, an artificial and easy ascent, which led to the top of the cliff. Dencombe's bench was half-way down, on a sheltered ledge, and the large lady, a massive, heterogeneous person, with bold black eyes and kind red cheeks, now took a few moments to rest. She wore dirty gauntlets and immense diamond earrings, at first she looked vulgar, but she contradicted this announcement in an agreeable off-hand tone. While her companions stood waiting for her she spread her skirts on the end of Dencombe's seat. The young man had gold spectacles, through which, with his finger

still in his red-covered book, he glanced at the volume, bound in the same shade of the same colour, lying on the lap of the original occupant of the bench. After an instant Dencombe understood that he was struck with a resemblance, had recognized the gilt stamp on the crimson cloth, was reading 'The Middle Years', and now perceived that somebody else had kept pace with him. The stranger was startled, possibly even a little ruffled, to find that he was not the only person who had been favoured with an early copy. The eyes of the two proprietors met for a moment, and Dencombe borrowed amusement from the expression of those of his competitor, those, it might even be inferred, of his admirer. They confessed to some resentment—they seemed to say 'Hang it, has he got it *already*?—Of course he's a brute of a reviewer!' Dencombe shuffled his copy out of sight while the opulent matron, rising from her repose, broke out 'I feel already the good of this air!'

'I can't say I do,' said the angular lady. 'I find myself quite let down.'

'I find myself horribly hungry. At what time did you order lunch?' her protectress pursued.

The young person put the question by 'Doctor Hugh always orders it.'

'I ordered nothing to day—I'm going to make you diet,' said their comrade.

'Then I shall go home and sleep. *Quir dort dîne!*'

'Can I trust you to Miss Vernham?' asked Doctor Hugh of his elder companion.

'Don't I trust *you*?' she archly inquired.

'Not too much!' Miss Vernham, with her eyes on the ground, permitted herself to declare 'You must come with us at least to the house,' she went on, while the personage on whom they appeared to be in attendance began to mount higher. She had got a little out of ear-shot, nevertheless Miss Vernham became, so far as Dencombe was concerned, less distinctly audible.

to murmur to the young man 'I don't think you realize all you owe the Countess!'

Absently, a moment, Doctor Hugh caused his gold-rimmed spectacles to shine at her

'Is that the way I strike you? I see—I see!'

'She's awfully good to us,' continued Miss Vernham, compelled by her interlocutor's immovability to stand there in spite of his discussion of private matters. Of what use would it have been that Dencombe should be sensitive to shades had he not detected in that immovability a strange influence from the quiet old convalescent in the great tweed cape? Miss Vernham appeared suddenly to become aware of some such connexion, for she added in a moment 'If you want to sun yourself here you can come back after you've seen us home'

Doctor Hugh, at this, hesitated, and Dencombe, in spite of a desire to pass for unconscious, risked a covert glance at him. What his eyes met this time, as it happened, was on the part of the young lady a queer stare, naturally vitreous, which made her aspect remind him of some figure (he couldn't name it) in a play or a novel, some sinister governess or tragic old maid. She seemed to scrutinize him, to challenge him, to say, from general spite 'What have you got to do with us?' At the same instant the rich humour of the Countess reached them from above 'Come, come, my little lambs, you should follow your old *bergere*!' Miss Vernham turned away at this, pursuing the ascent, and Doctor Hugh, after another mute appeal to Dencombe and a moment's evident demur, deposited his book on the bench, as if to keep his place or even as a sign that he would return, and bounded without difficulty up the rougher part of the cliff.

Equally innocent and infinite are the pleasures of observation and the resources engendered by the habit of analysing life. It amused poor Dencombe, as he dawdled in his tepid air-bath, to think that he was

waiting for a revelation of something at the back of a fine young mind. He looked hard at the book on the end of the bench, but he wouldn't have touched it for the world. It served his purpose to have a theory which should not be exposed to refutation. He already felt better of his melancholy, he had, according to his old formula, put his head at the window. A passing Countess could draw off the fancy when, like the elder of the ladies who had just retreated, she was as obvious as the giantess of a caravan. It was indeed general views that were terrible, short ones, contrary to an opinion sometimes expressed, were the refuge, were the remedy. Doctor Hugh couldn't possibly be anything but a reviewer who had understandings for early copies with publishers or with newspapers. He reappeared in a quarter of an hour, with visible relief at finding Dencombe on the spot, and the gleam of white teeth in an embarrassed but generous smile. He was perceptibly disappointed at the eclipse of the other copy of the book, it was a pretext the less for speaking to the stranger. But he spoke notwithstanding, he held up his own copy and broke out pleadingly.

'Do say, if you have occasion to speak of it, that it's the best thing he has done yet.'

Dencombe responded with a laugh. 'Done yet' was so amusing to him, made such a grand avenue of the future. Better still, the young man took *him* for a reviewer. He pulled out 'The Middle Years' from under his cape, but instinctively concealed any tell tale look of fatherhood. This was partly because a person was always a fool for calling attention to his work. 'Is that what you're going to say yourself?' he inquired of his visitor.

'I'm not quite sure I shall write anything. I don't, as a regular thing—I enjoy in peace. But it's awfully fine.'

Dencombe debated a moment. If his interlocutor had begun to abuse him he would have confessed on

the spot to his identity, but there was no harm in drawing him on a little to praise. He drew him on with such success that in a few moments his new acquaintance, seated by his side, was confessing candidly that Dencombe's novels were the only ones he could read a second time. He had come the day before from London, where a friend of his, a journalist, had lent him his copy of the last—the copy sent to the office of the journal and already the subject of a 'notice' which, as was pretended there (but one had to allow for 'swagger') it had taken a full quarter of an hour to prepare. He intimated that he was ashamed for his friend, and in the case of a work demanding and repaying study, of such inferior manners, and, with his fresh appreciation and inexplicable wish to express it, he speedily became for poor Dencombe a remarkable, a delightful apparition. Chance had brought the weary man of letters face to face with the greatest admirer in the new generation whom it was supposable he possessed. The admirer, in truth, was mystifying, so rare a case was it to find a bristling young doctor—he looked like a German physiologist—enamoured of literary form. It was an accident, but happier than most accidents, so that Dencombe, exhilarated as well as confounded, spent half an hour in making his visitor talk while he kept himself quiet. He explained his premature possession of 'The Middle Years' by an allusion to the friendship of the publisher, who, knowing he was at Bournemouth for his health, had paid him this graceful attention. He admitted that he had been ill, for Doctor Hugh would infallibly have guessed it, he even went so far as to wonder whether he mightn't look for some hygienic 'tip' from a personage combining so bright an enthusiasm with a presumable knowledge of the remedies now in vogue. It would shake his faith a little perhaps to have to take a doctor seriously who could take *him* so seriously, but he enjoyed this gushing modern youth and he felt with an

acute pang that there would still be work to do in a world in which such odd combinations were presented. It was not true, what he had tried for renunciation's sake to believe, that all the combinations were exhausted. They were not, they were not—they were infinite. The exhaustion was in the miserable artist.

Doctor Hugh was an ardent physiologist, saturated with the spirit of the age—in other words he had just taken his degree, but he was independent and various, he talked like a man who would have preferred to love literature best. He would fain have made fine phrases, but nature had denied him the trick. Some of the finest in 'The Middle Years' had struck him inordinately, and he took the liberty of reading them to Dencombe in support of his plea. He grew vivid, in the balmy air, to his companion, for whose deep refreshment he seemed to have been sent, and was particularly ingenuous in describing how recently he had become acquainted, and how instantly infatuated, with the only man who had put flesh between the ribs of an art that was starving on superstitions. He had not yet written to him—he was deterred by a sentiment of respect. Dencombe at this moment felicitated himself more than ever on having never answered the photographers. His visitor's attitude promised him a luxury of intercourse, but he surmised that a certain security in it, for Doctor Hugh, would depend not a little on the Countess. He learned without delay with what variety of Countess they were concerned, as well as the nature of the tie that united the curious trio. The large lady, an Englishwoman by birth and the daughter of a celebrated baritone, whose taste, without his talent, she had inherited, was the widow of a French nobleman and mistress of all that remained of the handsome fortune, the fruit of her father's earnings, that had constituted her dower. Miss Vernham, an odd creature but an accomplished pianist, was attached to her person at a salary. The Countess was generous, independent,

eccentric, she travelled with her minstrel and her medical man. Ignorant and passionate, she had nevertheless moments in which she was almost irresistible. Dencombe saw her sit for her portrait in Doctor Hugh's free sketch, and felt the picture of his young friend's relation to her frame itself in his mind. This young friend, for a representative of the new psychology, was himself easily hypnotized, and if he became abnormally communicative it was only a sign of his real subjection. Dencombe did accordingly what he wanted with him, even without being known as Dencombe.

Taken ill on a journey in Switzerland the Countess had picked him up at an hotel, and the accident of his happening to please her had made her offer him, with her imperious liberality, terms that couldn't fail to dazzle a practitioner without patients and whose resources had been drained dry by his studies. It was not the way he would have elected to spend his time, but it was time that would pass quickly, and meanwhile she was wonderfully kind. She exacted perpetual attention, but it was impossible not to like her. He gave details about his queer patient, a 'type' if there ever was one, who had in connexion with her flushed obesity and in addition to the morbid strain of a violent and aimless will a grave organic disorder, but he came back to his loved novelist, whom he was so good as to pronounce more essentially a poet than many of those who went in for verse, with a zeal excited, as all his indiscretion had been excited, by the happy chance of Dencombe's sympathy and the coincidence of their occupation. Dencombe had confessed to a slight personal acquaintance with the author of 'The Middle Years', but had not felt himself as ready as he could have wished when his companion, who had never yet encountered a being so privileged, began to be eager for particulars. He even thought that Doctor Hugh's eye at that moment emitted a glimmer of suspicion. But the young man was too inflamed to be shrewd and

repeatedly caught up the book to exclaim 'Did you notice this?' or 'Weren't you immensely struck with that?' 'There's a beautiful passage toward the end,' he broke out, and again he laid his hand upon the volume. As he turned the pages he came upon some thing else, while Dencombe saw him suddenly change colour. He had taken up, as it lay on the bench, Dencombe's copy instead of his own, and his neighbour immediately guessed the reason of his start. Doctor Hugh looked grave an instant, then he said 'I see you've been altering the text.' Dencombe was a passionate corrector, a fingerer of style, the last thing he ever arrived at was a form final for himself. His ideal would have been to publish secretly, and then, on the published text, treat himself to the terrified revise, sacrificing always a first edition and beginning for posterity and even for the collectors, poor dears, with a second. This morning, in 'The Middle Years', his pencil had pricked a dozen lights. He was amused at the effect of the young man's reproach, for an instant it made him change colour. He stammered, at any rate, ambiguously, then, through a blur of ebbing consciousness, saw Doctor Hugh's mystified eyes. He only had time to feel he was about to be ill again—that emotion, excitement, fatigue, the heat of the sun, the solicitation of the air, had combined to play him a trick, before, stretching out a hand to his visitor with a plaintive cry, he lost his senses altogether.

Later he knew that he had fainted and that Doctor Hugh had got him home in a bath chair, the conductor of which, prowling within hail for custom, had happened to remember seeing him in the garden of the hotel. He had recovered his perception in the transit, and had, in bed, that afternoon, a vague recollection of Doctor Hugh's young face, as they went together, bent over him in a comforting laugh and expressive of something more than a suspicion of his identity. That identity was ineffaceable now, and all the more that he was



disappointed, disgusted. He had been rash, been stupid, had gone out too soon, stayed out too long. He oughtn't to have exposed himself to strangers, he ought to have taken his servant. He felt as if he had fallen into a hole too deep to descry any little patch of heaven. He was confused about the time that had elapsed—he pieced the fragments together. He had seen his doctor, the real one, the one who had treated him from the first and who had again been very kind. His servant was in and out on tiptoe, looking very wise after the fact. He said more than once something about the sharp young gentleman. The rest was vagueness, in so far as it wasn't despair. The vagueness, however, justified itself by dreams, dozing anxieties from which he finally emerged to the consciousness of a dark room and a shaded candle.

'You'll be all right again—I know all about you now,' said a voice near him that he knew to be young. Then his meeting with Doctor Hugh came back. He was too discouraged to joke about it yet, but he was able to perceive, after a little, that the interest of it was intense for his visitor. 'Of course I can't attend you professionally—you've got your own man, with whom I've talked and who's excellent,' Doctor Hugh went on. 'But you must let me come to see you as a good friend. I've just looked in before going to bed. You're doing beautifully, but it's a good job I was with you on the cliff. I shall come in early to-morrow. I want to do something for you. I want to do everything. You've done a tremendous lot for me.' The young man held his hand, hanging over him, and poor Dencombe, weakly aware of this living pressure, simply lay there and accepted his devotion. He couldn't do anything less—he needed help too much.

The idea of the help he needed was very present to him that night, which he spent in a lucid stillness, an intensity of thought that constituted a reaction from his hours of stupor. He was lost, he was lost—he was

lost if he couldn't be saved. He was not afraid of suffering, of death, he was not even in love with life, but he had had a deep demonstration of desire. It came over him in the long, quiet hours that only with 'The Middle Years' had he taken his flight, only on that day, visited by soundless processions, had he recognized his kingdom. He had had a revelation of his range. What he dreaded was the idea that his reputation should stand on the unfinished. It was not with his past but with his future that it should properly be concerned. Illness and age rose before him like spectres with pitiless eyes. How was he to bribe such fates to give him the second chance? He had had the one chance that all men have—He had had the chance of life. He went to sleep again very late, and when he awoke Doctor Hugh was sitting by his head. There was already, by this time, something beautifully familiar in him.

'Don't think I've turned out your physician,' he said, 'I'm acting with his consent. He has been here and seen you. Somehow he seems to trust me. I told him how we happened to come together yesterday, and he recognizes that I've a peculiar right.'

Dencombe looked at him with a calculating earnestness. 'How have you squared the Countess?'

The young man blushed a little, but he laughed. 'Oh, never mind the Countess!'

'You told me she was very exacting.'

Doctor Hugh was silent a moment. 'So she is.'

'And Miss Vernham's an *intrigante*.'

'How do you know that?'

'I know everything. One *has* to, to write decently!'

'I think she's mad,' said limpid Doctor Hugh.

'Well, don't quarrel with the Countess—she's a present help to you.'

'I don't quarrel,' Doctor Hugh replied. 'But I don't get on with silly women.' Presently he added 'You seem very much alone.'

‘That often happens at my age I’ve outlived, I’ve lost by the way’

Doctor Hugh hesitated, then surmounting a soft scruple ‘Whom have you lost?’

‘Every one’

‘Ah, no,’ the young man murmured, laying a hand on his arm

‘I once had a wife—I once had a son My wife died when my child was born, and my boy, at school, was carried off by typhoid’

‘I wish I’d been there!’ said Doctor Hugh simply

‘Well—if you’re here!’ Dencombe answered, with a smile that, in spite of dimness, showed how much he liked to be sure of his companion’s whereabouts

‘You talk strangely of your age You’re not old’

‘Hypocrite—so early!’

‘I speak physiologically’

‘That’s the way I’ve been speaking for the last five years, and it’s exactly what I’ve been saying to myself It isn’t till we *are* old that we begin to tell ourselves we’re not!’

‘Yet I know I myself am young,’ Doctor Hugh declared

‘Not so well as I!’ laughed his patient, whose visitor indeed would have established the truth in question by the honesty with which he changed the point of view, remarking that it must be one of the charms of age—at any rate in the case of high distinction—to feel that one has laboured and achieved Doctor Hugh employed the common phrase about earning one’s rest, and it made poor Dencombe, for an instant, almost angry He recovered himself, however, to explain, lucidly enough, that if he, ungraciously, knew nothing of such a balm, it was doubtless because he had wasted inestimable years He had followed literature from the first, but he had taken a lifetime to get alongside of her Only to-day, at last, had he begun to *see*, so that what he had hitherto done was a movement without a direction

He had ripened too late and was so clumsily constituted that he had had to teach himself by mistakes

'I prefer your flowers, then, to other people's fruit, and your mistakes to other people's successes,' said gallant Doctor Hugh 'It's for your mistakes I admire you'

'You're happy—you don't know,' Dencombe answered

Looking at his watch the young man had got up, he named the hour of the afternoon at which he would return Dencombe warned him against committing himself too deeply, and expressed again all his dread of making him neglect the Countess—perhaps incur her displeasure

'I want to be like you—I want to learn by mistakes' Doctor Hugh laughed

'Take care you don't make too grave a one! But do come back,' Dencombe added, with the glimmer of a new idea

'You should have had more vanity!' Doctor Hugh spoke as if he knew the exact amount required to make a man of letters normal

'No, no—I only should have had more time I want another go'

'Another go?'

'I want an extension'

'An extension?' Again Doctor Hugh repeated Dencombe's words, with which he seemed to have been struck

'Don't you know?—I want to what they call "live"'

The young man, for good bye, had taken his hand, which closed with a certain force They looked at each other hard a moment 'You *will* live,' said Doctor Hugh

'Don't be superficial It's too serious!'

'You *shall* live!' Dencombe's visitor declared, turning pale

'Ah, that's better!' And as he retired the invalid, with a troubled laugh, sank gratefully back

All that day and all the following night he wondered if it mightn't be arranged His doctor came again, his servant was attentive, but it was to his confident young friend that he found himself mentally appealing His collapse on the cliff was plausibly explained, and his liberation, on a better basis, promised for the morrow, meanwhile, however, the intensity of his meditations kept him tranquil and made him indifferent The idea that occupied him was none the less absorbing because it was a morbid fancy Here was a clever son of the age, ingenious and ardent, who happened to have set him up for connoisseurs to worship This servant of his altar had all the new learning in science and all the old reverence in faith, wouldn't he therefore put his knowledge at the disposal of his sympathy, his craft at the disposal of his love? Couldn't he be trusted to invent a remedy for a poor artist to whose art he had paid a tribute? If he couldn't, the alternative was hard Dencombe would have to surrender to silence, unvindicated and undivined The rest of the day and all the next he toyed in secret with this sweet futility Who would work the miracle for him but the young man who could combine such lucidity with such passion? He thought of the fairy tales of science and charmed himself into forgetting that he looked for a magic that was not of this world Doctor Hugh was an apparition, and that placed him above the law He came and went while his patient, who sat up, followed him with supplicating eyes The interest of knowing the great author had made the young man begin 'The Middle Years' afresh, and would help him to find a deeper meaning in its pages Dencombe had told him what he 'tried for', with all his intelligence, on a first perusal, Doctor Hugh had failed to guess it The baffled celebrity wondered then who in the world *would* guess it he was amused once more at the fine, full way with

which an intention could be missed Yet he wouldn't rail at the general mind to day—consoling as that ever had been the revelation of his own slowness had seemed to make all stupidity sacred

Doctor Hugh, after a little, was visibly worried, confessing, on inquiry, to a source of embarrassment at home 'Stick to the Countess—don't mind me,' Dencombe said, repeatedly, for his companion was frank enough about the large lady's attitude She was so jealous that she had fallen ill—she resented such a breach of allegiance She paid so much for his fidelity that she must have it all she refused him the right to other sympathies, charged him with scheming to make her die alone, for it was needless to point out how little Miss Vernham was a resource in trouble When Doctor Hugh mentioned that the Countess would already have left Bournemouth if he hadn't kept her in bed, poor Dencombe held his arm tighter and said with decision 'Take her straight away' They had gone out together, walking back to the sheltered nook in which, the other day, they had met The young man, who had given his companion a personal support, declared with emphasis that his conscience was clear—he could ride two horses at once Didn't he dream, for his future, of a time when he should have to ride five hundred? Longing equally for virtue, Dencombe replied that in that golden age no patient would pretend to have contracted with him for his whole attention On the part of the Countess was not such an avidity lawful? Doctor Hugh denied it, said there was no contract but only a free understanding, and that a sordid servitude was impossible to a generous spirit, he liked moreover to talk about art, and that was the subject on which, this time, as they sat together on the sunny bench, he tried most to engage the author of 'The Middle Years' Dencombe, soaring again a little on the weak wings of convalescence and still haunted by that happy notion of an organized rescue found another strain of

eloquence to plead the cause of a certain splendid 'last manner', the very citadel, as it would prove, of his reputation, the stronghold into which his real treasure would be gathered. While his listener gave up the morning and the great still sea appeared to wait, he had a wonderful explanatory hour. Even for himself he was inspired as he told of what his treasure would consist—the precious metals he would dig from the mine, the jewels rare, strings of pearls, he would hang between the columns of his temple. He was wonderful for himself, so thick his convictions crowded, but he was still more wonderful for Doctor Hugh, who assured him, none the less, that the very pages he had just published were already encrusted with gems. The young man, however, panted for the combinations to come, and, before the face of the beautiful day, renewed to Dencombe his guarantee that his profession would hold itself responsible for such a life. Then he suddenly clapped his hand upon his watch pocket and asked leave to absent himself for half an hour. Dencombe waited there for his return, but was at last recalled to the actual by the fall of a shadow across the ground. The shadow darkened into that of Miss Vernham, the young lady in attendance on the Countess, whom Dencombe, recognizing her, perceived so clearly to have come to speak to him that he rose from his bench to acknowledge the civility. Miss Vernham indeed proved not particularly civil, she looked strangely agitated, and her type was now unmistakable.

'Excuse me if I inquire,' she said, 'whether it's too much to hope that you may be induced to leave Doctor Hugh alone.' Then, before Dencombe, greatly disconcerted, could protest, 'You ought to be informed that you stand in his light, that you may do him a terrible injury.'

'Do you mean by causing the Countess to dispense with his services?'

'By causing her to disinherit him.' Dencombe

stared at this, and Miss Vernham pursued, in the gratification of seeing she could produce an impression 'It has depended on himself to come into something very handsome. He has had a magnificent prospect, but I think you've succeeded in spoiling it.'

'Not intentionally, I assure you. Is there no hope the accident may be repaired?' Dencombe asked.

'She was ready to do anything for him. She takes great fancies, she lets herself go—it's her way. She has no relations, she's free to dispose of her money, and she's very ill.'

'I'm very sorry to hear it,' Dencombe stammered.

'Wouldn't it be possible for you to leave Bourne-mouth? That's what I've come to ask of you.'

Poor Dencombe sank down on his bench. 'I'm very ill myself, but I'll try.'

Miss Vernham still stood there with her colourless eyes and the brutality of her good conscience. 'Before it's too late, please!' she said, and with this she turned her back, in order, quickly, as if it had been a business to which she could spare but a precious moment, to pass out of his sight.

Oh, yes, after this Dencombe was certainly very ill. Miss Vernham had upset him with her rough, fierce news, it was the sharpest shock to him to discover what was at stake for a penniless young man of fine parts. He sat trembling on his bench, staring at the waste of waters, feeling sick with the directness of the blow. He was indeed too weak, too unsteady, too alarmed, but he would make the effort to get away, for he couldn't accept the guilt of interference, and his honour was really involved. He would hobble home, at any rate, and then he would think what was to be done. He made his way back to the hotel and, as he went, had a characteristic vision of Miss Vernham's great motive. The Countess hated women, of course, Dencombe was lucid about that, so the hungry pianist had no personal hopes and could only console herself



with the bold conception of helping Doctor Hugh in order either to marry him after he should get his money or to induce him to recognize her title to compensation and buy her off. If she had befriended him at a fruitful crisis he would really, as a man of delicacy, and she knew what to think of that point, have to reckon with her.

At the hotel Dencombe's servant insisted on his going back to bed. The invalid had talked about catching a train and had begun with orders to pack, after which his humming nerves had yielded to a sense of sickness. He consented to see his physician, who immediately was sent for, but he wished it to be understood that his door was irrevocably closed to Doctor Hugh. He had his plan, which was so fine that he rejoiced in it after getting back to bed. Doctor Hugh, suddenly finding himself snubbed without mercy, would, in natural disgust and to the joy of Miss Vernham, renew his allegiance to the Countess. When his physician arrived Dencombe learned that he was feverish and that this was very wrong. He was to cultivate calmness and try, if possible, not to think. For the rest of the day he wooed stupidity, but there was an ache that kept him sentient, the probable sacrifice of his 'extension', the limit of his course. His medical adviser was anything but pleased, his successive relapses were ominous. He charged this personage to put out a strong hand and take Doctor Hugh off his mind—it would contribute so much to his being quiet. The agitating name, in his room, was not mentioned again, but his security was a smothered fear, and it was not confirmed by the receipt, at ten o'clock that evening, of a telegram which his servant opened and read for him and to which, with an address in London, the signature of Miss Vernham was attached. 'Beseech you to use all influence to make our friend join us here in the morning. Countess much the worse for dreadful journey, but everything may still be saved.' The two ladies had gathered themselves up and had been capable in the afternoon of a spiteful

revolution They had started for the capital, and if the elder one, as Miss Vernham had announced, was very ill, she had wished to make it clear that she was proportionately reckless Poor Dencombe, who was not reckless and who only desired that everything should indeed be 'saved', sent this missive straight off to the young man's lodging and had on the morrow the pleasure of knowing that he had quitted Bournemouth by an early train

Two days later he pressed in with a copy of a literary journal in his hand He had returned because he was anxious and for the pleasure of flourishing the great review of 'The Middle Years' Here at least was something adequate—it rose to the occasion, it was an acclamation, a reparation, a critical attempt to place the author in the niche he had fairly won Dencombe accepted and submitted, he made neither objection nor inquiry, for old complications had returned and he had had two atrocious days He was convinced not only that he should never again leave his bed, so that his young friend might pardonably remain, but that the demand he should make on the patience of beholders would be very moderate indeed Doctor Hugh had been to town, and he tried to find in his eyes some confession that the Countess was pacified and his legacy clinched, but all he could see there was the light of his juvenile joy in two or three of the phrases of the news paper Dencombe couldn't read them, but when his visitor had insisted on repeating them more than once he was able to shake an unintoxicated head 'Ah, no, but they would have been true of what I *could* have done'

'What people "could have done" is mainly what they've in fact done,' Doctor Hugh contended

'Mainly, yes, but I've been an idiot!' said Dencombe

Doctor Hugh did remain, the end was coming fast Two days later Dencombe observed to him, by way of the feeblest of jokes, that there would now be no question whatever of a second chance At this the young man stared, then he exclaimed 'Why, it has

come to pass—it has come to pass ' The second chance has been the public's—the chance to find the point of view, to pick up the pearl ' '

' Oh, the pearl ' ' poor Dencombe uneasily sighed A smile as cold as a winter sunset flickered on his drawn lips as he added ' The pearl is the unwritten—the pearl is the unalloyed, the *rest*, the lost ' '

From that moment he was less and less present, heedless to all appearance of what went on around him. His disease was definitely mortal, of an action as relentless, after the short arrest that had enabled him to fall in with Doctor Hugh, as a leak in a great ship Sinking steadily, though this visitor, a man of rare resources, now cordially approved by his physician, showed end less art in guarding him from pain, poor Dencombe kept no reckoning of favour or neglect, betrayed no symptom of regret or speculation Yet towards the last he gave a sign of having noticed that for two days Doctor Hugh had not been in his room, a sign that consisted of his suddenly opening his eyes to ask of him if he had spent the interval with the Countess

' The Countess is dead,' said Doctor Hugh ' I knew that in a particular contingency she wouldn't resist I went to her grave '

Dencombe's eyes opened wider ' She left you "something handsome" ' '

The young man gave a laugh almost too light for a chamber of woe ' Never a penny She roundly cursed me '

' Cursed you ? ' Dencombe murmured

' For giving her up I gave her up for *you* I had to choose,' his companion explained

' You chose to let a fortune go ? '

' I chose to accept, whatever they might be, the consequences of my infatuation,' smiled Doctor Hugh Then, as a larger pleasantry ' A fortune be hanged ' It's your own fault if I can't get your things out of my head '

The immediate tribute to his humour was a long, bewildered moan, after which, for many hours, many

days, Dencombe lay motionless and absent. A response so absolute, such a glimpse of a definite result and such a sense of credit worked together in his mind and, producing a strange commotion, slowly altered and transfigured his despair. The sense of cold submersion left him—he seemed to float without an effort. The incident was extraordinary as evidence, and it shed an intenser light. At the last he signed to Doctor Hugh to listen, and, when he was down on his knees by the pillow, brought him very near.

‘You’ve made me think it all a delusion.’

‘Not your glory, my dear friend,’ stammered the young man.

‘Not my glory—what there is of it! It is glory—to have been tested, to have had our little quality and cast our little spell. The thing is to have made somebody care. You happen to be crazy, of course, but that doesn’t affect the law.’

‘You’re a great success!’ said Doctor Hugh, putting into his young voice the ring of a marriage bell.

Dencombe lay taking this in, then he gathered strength to speak once more. ‘A second chance—that’s the delusion. There never was to be but one. We work in the dark—we do what we can—we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art.’

‘If you’ve doubted, if you’ve despaired, you’ve always “done” it,’ his visitor subtly argued.

‘We’ve done something or other,’ Dencombe conceded. ‘Something or other is everything. It’s the feasible. It’s *you*!’

‘Comforter!’ poor Dencombe ironically sighed.

‘But it’s true,’ insisted his friend.

‘It’s true. It’s frustration that doesn’t count.’

‘Frustration’s only life,’ said Doctor Hugh.

‘Yes, it’s what passes.’ Poor Dencombe was barely audible, but he had marked with the words the virtual end of his first and only chance.

## THE ABASEMENT OF THE NORTHMORES

[From *The Soft Side* 1900]

### I

WHEN Lord Northmore died public reference to the event took for the most part rather a ponderous and embarrassed form. A great political figure had passed away. A great light of our time had been quenched in mid career. A great usefulness had somewhat anticipated its term, though a great part, none the less, had been signally played. The note of greatness, all along the line, kept sounding, in short, by a force of its own, and the image of the departed evidently lent itself with ease to figures and flourishes, the poetry of the daily press. The newspapers and their purchasers equally did their duty by it—arranged it neatly and impressively, though perhaps with a hand a little violently expeditious, upon the funeral car, saw the conveyance properly down the avenue, and then, finding the subject suddenly quite exhausted, proceeded to the next item on their list. His lordship had been a person, in fact, in connexion with whom there was almost nothing but the fine monotony of his success to mention. This success had been his profession, his means as well as his end, so that his career admitted of no other description and demanded, indeed suffered, no further analysis. He had made politics, he had made literature, he had made land, he had made a bad manner and a great many mistakes, he had made a gaunt, foolish wife, two extravagant sons and four awkward daughters—he had made everything, as he *could* have made almost anything, thoroughly pay. There had been something deep down in him that did it, and his old friend Warren Hope, the person knowing him earliest and probably, on the whole, best, had never, even to the last, for curiosity, quite made out what it was. The secret was one that this distinctly

distanced competitor had in fact mastered as little for intellectual relief as for emulous use, and there was quite a kind of tribute to it in the way that, the night before the obsequies and addressing himself to his wife, he said after some silent thought\* 'Hang it, you know, I must see the old boy through I must go to the grave'

Mrs Hope looked at her husband at first in anxious silence 'I've no patience with you You're much more ill than *he* ever was'

'Ah, but if that qualifies me but for the funerals of others—!'

'It qualifies you to break my heart by your exaggerated chivalry, your renewed refusal to consider your interests You sacrificed them to him, for thirty years, again and again, and from this supreme sacrifice—possibly that of your life—you might, in your condition, I think, be absolved' She indeed lost patience 'To the grave—in this weather—after his treatment of you!'

'My dear girl,' Hope replied, 'his treatment of me is a figment of your ingenious mind—your too passionate, your beautiful loyalty Loyalty, I mean, to *me*'

'I certainly leave it to you,' she declared, 'to have any to *him*!'

'Well, he was, after all, one's oldest, one's earliest friend I'm not in such bad case—I do go out, and I want to do the decent thing The fact remains that we never broke—we always kept together'

'Yes indeed,' she laughed in her bitterness, 'he always took care of that' He never recognised you, but he never let you go You kept him up, and he kept you down He used you, to the last drop he could squeeze, and left you the only one to wonder, in your incredible idealism and your incorrigible modesty, how on earth such an idiot made his way He made his way on your back You put it candidly to others—"What in the world was his gift?" And others are such gaping



there was nothing else to be said. There was nothing else, and yet, in her sombre, her strangely apprehensive solitude at this hour, she said much more than I can tell. It all came to this—that there had been, somewhere and somehow, a wrong. Warren ~~was~~ the one who should have succeeded. But she was the one person who knew it now, the single other person having descended, with *his* knowledge, to the tomb.

She sat there, she roamed there, in the waiting grey-ness of her small London house, with a deepened sense of the several odd knowledges that had flourished in their company of three. Warren had always known everything and, with his easy power,—in nothing so high as for indifference—had never cared. John Northmore had known, for he had, years and years before, told her so, and thus had had a reason the more—in addition to not believing her stupid—for guessing at her view. She lived back, she lived it over, she had it all there in her hand. John Northmore had known her first, and how he had wanted to marry her the fat little bundle of his love letters still survived to tell. He had introduced Warren Hope to her—quite by accident and because, at the time they had chambers together, he couldn't help it—that was the one thing he *had* done for them. Thinking of it now, she perhaps saw how much he might conscientiously have considered that it disburdened him of more. Six months later she had accepted Warren, and for just the reason the absence of which had deter- mined her treatment of his friend. She had believed in his future. She held that John Northmore had never afterwards remitted the effort to ascertain the degree in which she felt herself 'sold'. But, thank God, she had never shown him.

Her husband came home with a chill, and she put him straight to bed. For a week, as she hovered near him, they only looked deep things at each other, the point was too quickly passed at which she could bearably have said 'I to'd you so'. That his late patron should



never have had difficulty in making *him* pay was certainly no marvel. But it was indeed a little too much, after all, that he should have made him pay with his life. This was what it had come to—she was sure, now, from the first. Congestion of the lungs, that night, declared itself, and on the morrow, sickeningly, she was face to face with pneumonia. It was more than—with all that had gone before—they could meet. Warren Hope ten days later succumbed. Tenderly, divinely as he loved her, she felt his surrender, through all the anguish, as an unspeakable part of the sublimity of indifference into which his hapless history had finally flowered. ‘His easy power, his easy power!’—her passion had never yet found such relief in that simple, secret phrase for him. He was so proud, so fine and so flexible, that to fail a little had been as bad for him as to fail much, therefore he had opened the flood gates wide—had thrown, as the saying was, the helve after the hatchet. He had amused himself with seeing what the devouring world would take. Well, it had taken all.

## II

But it was after he had gone that his name showed as written in water. What had he left? He had only left *her* and her grey desolation, her lonely piety and her sore, unresting rebellion. Sometimes, when a man died, it did something for him that life had not done, people, after a little, on one side or the other, discovered and named him, annexing him to their flag. But the sense of having lost Warren Hope appeared not in the least to have quickened the world’s wit, the sharper pang for his widow indeed sprang just from the common place way in which he was spoken of as known. She received letters enough, when it came to that, for of course, personally, he had been liked, the newspapers were fairly copious and perfectly stupid, the three or four societies, ‘learned’ and other, to which he had

belonged, passed resolutions of regret and condolence, and the three or four colleagues about whom he himself used to be most amusing stammered eulogies, but almost anything, really, would have been better for her than the general understanding, that the occasion had been met. Two or three solemn noodles in 'administrative circles' wrote her that she must have been gratified at the unanimity of regret, the implication being clearly that she was ridiculous if she were not. Meanwhile what she felt was that she could have borne well enough his not being noticed at all, what she couldn't bear was this treatment of him as a minor celebrity. He was, in economics, in the higher politics, in philosophic history, a splendid unestimated genius, or he was nothing. He wasn't, at any rate—heaven forbid!—a 'notable figure'. The waters, none the less, closed over him as over Lord Northmore, which was precisely, as time went on, the fact she found it hardest to accept. That personage, the week after his death, without an hour of reprieve, the place swept as clean of him as a hall, lent for a charity, of the tables and booths of a three days' bazaar—that personage had gone straight to the bottom, dropped like a crumpled circular into the waste basket. Where then was the difference?—if the end *was* the end for each alike? For Warren it should have been properly the beginning.

During the first six months she wondered what she could herself do, and had much of the time the sense of walking by some swift stream on which an object dear to her was floating out to sea. All her instinct was to keep up with it, not to lose sight of it, to hurry along the bank and reach in advance some point from which she could stretch forth and catch and save it. Alas, it only floated and floated, she held it in sight, for the stream was long, but no convenient projection offered itself to the rescue. She ran, she watched, she lived with her great fear, and all the while, as the distance to the sea diminished, the current visibly

increased At the last, to do anything, she must hurry She went into his papers, she ransacked his drawers, something of that sort, at least, she might do But there were difficulties, the case was special, she lost herself in the labyrinth, and her competence was questioned, two or three friends to whose judgement she appealed struck her as tepid, even as cold, and publishers, when sounded—most of all in fact the house through which his three or four important volumes had been given to the world—showed an absence of eagerness for a collection of literary remains It was only now that she fully understood how remarkably little the three or four important volumes had ‘done’ He had successfully kept that from her, as he had kept other things she might have ached at to handle his notes and memoranda was to come at every turn, in the wilderness, the wide desert, upon the footsteps of his scrupulous soul But she had at last to accept the truth that it was only for herself, her own relief, she must follow him His work, unencouraged and interrupted, failed of a final form there would have been nothing to offer but fragments of fragments She felt, all the same, in recognizing this, that she abandoned him, he died for her at that hour over again

The hour moreover happened to coincide with another hour, so that the two mingled their bitterness She received a note from Lady Northmore, announcing a desire to gather in and publish his late lordship’s letters, so numerous and so interesting, and inviting Mrs Hope, as a more than probable depositary, to be so good as to contribute to the project those addressed to her husband This gave her a start of more kinds than one The long comedy of his late lordship’s greatness was *not* then over? The monument was to be built to him that she had but now schooled herself to regard as impossible for his defeated friend? Everything was to break out afresh, the comparisons, the contrasts, the conclusions so invidiously in his favour?—the business all cleverly

managed to place him in the light and keep every one else in the shade? Letters?—had John Northmore indited three lines that could, at that time of day, be of the smallest consequence? Whose idea was such a publication, and what infatuated editorial patronage could the family have secured? She of course didn't know, but she should be surprised if there were material. Then it came to her, on reflection, that editors and publishers must of course have flocked—his star would still rule. Why shouldn't he make his letters pay in death as he had made them pay in life? Such as they were they *had* paid. They would be a tremendous success. She thought again of her husband's rich, confused relics—thought of the loose blocks of marble that could only be now where they had fallen, after which, with one of her deep and frequent sighs, she took up anew Lady Northmore's communication.

His letters to Warren, kept or not kept, had never so much as occurred to her. Those to herself were buried and safe—she knew where her hand would find them, but those to herself her correspondent had carefully not asked for and was probably unaware of the existence of. They belonged moreover to that phase of the great man's career that was distinctly—as it could only be called—previous previous to the greatness, to the proper subject of the volume, and, in especial, to Lady Northmore. The faded fat packet lurked still where it had lurked for years, but she could no more to day have said why she had kept it than why—though he knew of the early episode—she had never mentioned her preservation of it to Warren. This last circumstance certainly absolved her from mentioning it to Lady Northmore, who, no doubt, knew of the episode too. The odd part of the matter was, at any rate, that her retention of these documents had not been an accident. She had obeyed a dim instinct or a vague calculation. A calculation of what? She couldn't have told. It had operated, at the back of her

head, simply as a sense that, not destroyed, the complete little collection made for safety But for whose, just heaven? Perhaps she should still see, though nothing, she trusted, would occur requiring her to touch the things or to read them over She wouldn't have touched them or read them over for the world

She had not as yet, at all events, overhauled those receptacles in which the letters Warren kept would have accumulated, and she had her doubts of their containing any of Lord Northmore's Why should he have kept any? Even she herself had had more reasons Was his lordship's later epistolary manner supposed to be good, or of the kind that, on any grounds, prohibited the waste basket or the fire? Warren had lived in a deluge of documents, but these perhaps he might have regarded as contributions to contemporary history None the less, surely, he wouldn't have stored up many She began to look, in cupboards, boxes, drawers yet unvisited, and she had her surprises both as to what he had kept and as to what he hadn't Every word of her own was there—every note that, in occasional absence, he had ever had from her Well, that matched happily enough her knowing just where to put her finger on every note that, on such occasions, she herself had received *Their* correspondence at least was complete

But so, in fine, on one side, it gradually appeared, was Lord Northmore's The superabundance of these missives had not been sacrificed by her husband, evidently, to any passing convenience, she judged more and more that he had preserved every scrap, and she was unable to conceal from herself that she was—she scarce knew why—a trifle disappointed She had not quite unhelpfully, even though vaguely, seen herself writing to Lady Northmore that, to her great regret and after an exhausting search, she could find nothing at all

She found, alas, in fact, everything She was conscientious and she hunted to the end, by which time one of the tables quite groaned with the fruits of her

quest The letters appeared moreover to have been cared for and roughly classified—she should be able to consign them to the family in excellent order She made sure, at the last, that she had overlooked nothing, and then, fatigued and distinctly irritated, she prepared to answer in a sense so different from the answer she had, as might have been said, planned Face to face with her note, however, she found she couldn't write it, and, not to be alone longer with the pile on the table, she presently went out of the room Late in the evening—just before going to bed—she came back, almost as if she hoped there might have been since the afternoon some pleasant intervention in the interest of her distaste Mightn't it have magically happened that her discovery was a mistake ?—that the letters were either not there or were, after all, somebody else's ? Ah, they *were* there, and as she raised her lighted candle in the dusk the pile on the table squared itself with insolence On this, poor lady, she had for an hour her temptation

It was obscure, it was absurd, all that could be said of it was that it was, for the moment, extreme She saw herself, as she circled round the table, writing with perfect impunity 'Dear Lady Northmore, I have hunted high and low and have found nothing whatever My husband evidently, before his death, destroyed everything I'm so sorry—I should have liked so much to help you Yours most truly' She should have only, on the morrow, privately and resolutely to annihilate the heap, and those words would remain an account of the matter that nobody was in a position to challenge What good it would do her ?—was *that* the question ? It would do her the good that it would make poor

been so careful to keep everything I have a mass at your disposition if you can conveniently send So glad to be able to help your work Yours most truly' She stepped out as she was and dropped the letter into the nearest pillar box By noon the next day the table had, to her relief, been cleared Her ladyship sent a responsible servant—her butler, in a four wheeler, with a large japanned box

### III

After this, for a twelvemonth, there were frequent announcements and allusions They came to her from every side, and there were hours at which the air, to her imagination, contained almost nothing else There had been, at an early stage, immediately after Lady Northmore's communication to her, an official appeal, a circular *urbi et orbi*, reproduced, applauded, commented in every newspaper, desiring all possessors of letters to remit them without delay to the family The family, to do it justice, rewarded the sacrifice freely—so far as it was a reward to keep the world informed of the rapid progress of the work Material had shown itself more copious than was to have been conceived Interesting as the imminent volumes had naturally been expected to prove, those who had been favoured with a glimpse of their contents already felt warranted in promising the public an unprecedented treat They would throw upon certain sides of the writer's mind and career lights hitherto unsuspected Lady Northmore, deeply indebted for favours received, begged to renew her solicitation, gratifying as the response had been, it was believed that, particularly in connexion with several dates, which were given, a residuum of buried treasure might still be looked for

Mrs Hope saw, she felt, as time went on, fewer and fewer people, yet her circle was even now not too narrow for her to hear it blown about that Thompson and Johnson had 'been asked' Conversation in the

London world struck her for a time as almost confined to such questions and such answers 'Have *you* been asked?' 'Oh yes—rather Months ago And *you*?' The whole place was under contribution, and the striking thing was that being asked had been clearly accompanied, in every case, with the ability to respond The spring had but to be touched—millions of letters flew out Ten volumes, at such a rate, Mrs Hope mused, would not exhaust the supply She mused a great deal—did nothing but muse, and, strange as this may at first appear, it was inevitable that one of the final results of her musing should be a principle of doubt It could only seem possible, in view of such unanimity, that she should, after all, have been mistaken It *was* then, to the general sense, the great departed's, a reputation sound and safe It wasn't he who had been at fault—it was her silly self, still burdened with the fallibility of Being He had been a giant then, and the letters would triumphantly show it She had looked only at the envelopes of those she had surrendered, but she was prepared for anything There was the fact, not to be blinked, of Warren's own marked testimony The attitude of others was but *his* attitude, and she sighed as she perceived him in this case, for the only time in his life, on the side of the chattering crowd

She was perfectly aware that her obsession had run away with her, but as Lady Northmore's publication really loomed into view—it was now definitely announced for March, and they were in January—her pulses quickened so that she found herself, in the long nights, mostly lying awake It was in one of these vigils that, suddenly, in the cold darkness, she felt the brush of almost the only thought that, for many a month, had not made her wince, the effect of which was that she bounded out of bed with a new felicity Her impatience flashed, on the spot, up to its maximum—she could scarce wait for day to give herself to action Her idea was neither more nor less than immediately



to collect and put forth the letters of *her* hero. She would publish her husband's own—glory be to God!—and she even wasted none of her time in wondering why she had waited. She *had* waited—all too long, yet it was perhaps no more than natural that, for eyes sealed with tears and a heart heavy with injustice, there should not have been an instant vision of where her remedy lay. She thought of it already as her remedy—though she would probably have found an awkwardness in giving a name, publicly, to her wrong. It was a wrong to feel, but not, doubtless, to talk about. And lo, straightway, the balm had begun to drop—the balance would so soon be even. She spent all that day in reading over her own old letters, too intimate and too sacred—oh, unluckily!—to figure in her project, but pouring wind, nevertheless, into its sails and adding magnificence to her presumption. She had of course, with separation, all their years, never frequent and never prolonged, known her husband as a correspondent much less than others, still, these relics constituted a property—she was surprised at their number—and testified hugely to his inimitable gift.

He was a letter writer if you liked—natural, witty, various, vivid, playing, with the idlest, lightest hand, up and down the whole scale. His easy power—his easy power—everything that brought him back brought back that. The most numerous were of course the earlier, and the series of those during their engagement, witnesses of their long probation, which were rich and unbroken, so full indeed and so wonderful that she fairly groaned at having to defer to the common measure of married modesty. There was discretion, there was usage, there was taste, but she would fain have flown in their face. If there were pages too intimate to publish, there were too many others too rare to suppress. Perhaps after her death—! It not only pulled her up, the happy thought of that liberation alike for her self and for her treasure, making her promise herself

straightway to arrange it quickened extremely her impatience for the term of her mortality, which would leave a free field to the justice she invoked. Her great resource, however, clearly, would be the friends, the colleagues, the private admirers to whom he had written for years, to whom she had known him to write, and many of whose own letters, by no means remarkable, she had come upon in her recent sortings and siftings. She drew up a list of these persons and immediately wrote to them or, in cases in which they had passed away, to their widows, children, representatives, reminding herself in the process not disagreeably, in fact quite inspiringly, of Lady Northmore. It had struck her that Lady Northmore took, somehow, a good deal for granted, but this idea failed, oddly enough, to occur to her in regard to Mrs Hope. It was indeed with her ladyship she began, addressing her exactly in the terms of this personage's own appeal, every word of which she remembered.

Then she waited, but she had not, in connexion with that quarter, to wait long. 'Dear Mrs Hope, I have hunted high and low and have found nothing whatever. My husband evidently, before his death, destroyed everything. I'm so sorry—I should have liked so much to help you. Yours most truly.' This was all Lady Northmore wrote, without the grace of an allusion to the assistance she herself had received, though even in the first flush of amazement and resentment our friend recognized the odd identity of form between her note and another that had never been written. She was answered as she had, in the like case, in her one evil hour, dreamed of answering. But the answer was not over with this—it had still to flow in, day after day, from every other source reached by her question. And day after day, while amazement and resentment deepened, it consisted simply of three lines of regret. Everybody had looked, and everybody had looked in vain. Everybody would have been so glad, but every-

body was reduced to being, like Lady Northmore, so sorry Nobody could find anything, and nothing, it was therefore to be gathered, had been kept Some of these informants were more prompt than others, but all replied in time, and the business went on for a month, at the end of which the poor woman, stricken, chilled to the heart, accepted perforce her situation and turned her face to the wall In this position, as it were, she remained for days, taking heed of nothing and only feeling and nursing her wound It was a wound the more cruel for having found her so unguarded From the moment her remedy had been whispered to her, she had not had an hour of doubt, and the beautiful side of it had seemed that it was, above all, so easy The strangeness of the issue was even greater than the pain Truly it was a world *pour rire*, the world in which John Northmore's letters were classed and labelled for posterity and Warren Hope's kindled fires All sense, all measure of anything, could only leave one—leave one indifferent and dumb There was nothing to be done—the show was upside-down John Northmore was immortal and Warren Hope was damned And for herself, she was finished She was beaten She leaned thus, motionless, muffled, for a time of which, as I say, she took no account, then at last she was reached by a great sound that made her turn her veiled head It was the report of the appearance of Lady Northmore's volumes

## IV

This was a great noise indeed, and all the papers, that day, were particularly loud with it It met the reader on the threshold, and the work was everywhere the subject of a 'leader' as well as of a review The reviews moreover, she saw at a glance, overflowed with quotation, it was enough to look at two or three sheets to judge of the enthusiasm Mrs Hope looked at the two or three that, for confirmation of the single one she

habitually received, she caused, while at breakfast, to be purchased, but her attention failed to penetrate further, she couldn't, she found, face the contrast between the pride of the Northmores on such a morning and her own humiliation. The papers brought it too sharply home, she pushed them away and, to get rid of them, not to feel their presence, left the house early. She found pretexts for remaining out, it was as if there had been a cup prescribed for her to drain, yet she could put off the hour of the ordeal. She filled the time as she might, bought things, in shops, for which she had no use, and called on friends for whom she had no taste. Most of her friends, at present, were reduced to that category, and she had to choose, for visits, the houses guiltless, as she might have said, of her husband's blood. She couldn't speak to the people who had answered in such dreadful terms her late circular, on the other hand the people out of its range were such as would also be stolidly unconscious of Lady Northmore's publication and from whom the sop of sympathy could be but circuitously extracted. As she had lunched at a pastrycook's, so she stopped out to tea, and the March dusk had fallen when she got home. The first thing she then saw in her lighted hall was a large neat package on the table, whereupon she knew before approaching it that Lady Northmore had sent her the book. It had arrived, she learned, just after her going out, so that, had she not done this, she might have spent the day with it. She now quite understood her prompt instinct of flight. Well, flight had helped her, and the touch of the great indifferent general life. She would at last face the music.

She faced it, after dinner, in her little closed drawing room, unwrapping the two volumes—*The Public and Private Correspondence of the Right Honourable &c, &c*—and looking well, first, at the great escutcheon on the purple cover and at the various portraits within, so numerous that wherever she opened she came on one

It had not been present to her before that he was so perpetually 'sitting', but he figured in every phase and in every style, and the gallery was enriched with views of his successive residences, each one a little grander than the last. She had ever, in general, found that, in portraits, whether of the known or the unknown, the eyes seemed to seek and to meet her own, but John Northmore everywhere looked straight away from her, quite as if he had been in the room and were unconscious of acquaintance. The effect of this was, oddly enough, so sharp that at the end of ten minutes she found her self sinking into his text as if she had been a stranger and beholden, vulgarly and accidentally, to one of the libraries. She had been afraid to plunge, but from the moment she got in she was—to do every one, all round, justice—thoroughly held. She sat there late, and she made so many reflections and discoveries that—as the only way to put it—she passed from mystification to stupefaction. Her own contribution had been almost exhaustively used, she had counted Warren's letters before sending them and perceived now that scarce a dozen were not all there—a circumstance explaining to her Lady Northmore's present. It was to these pages she had turned first, and it was as she hung over them that her stupefaction dawned. It took, in truth, at the outset, a particular form—the form of a sharpened wonder at Warren's unnatural piety. Her original surprise had been keen—when she had tried to take reasons for granted, but her original surprise was as nothing to her actual bewilderment. The letters to Warren had been practically, she judged, for the family, the great card, yet if the great card made only that figure, what on earth was one to think of the rest of the pack?

She pressed on, at random, with a sense of rising fever, she trembled, almost panting, not to be sure too soon, but wherever she turned she found the prodigy spread. The letters to Warren were an abyss of inanity, the others followed suit as they could, the

book was surely then a sandy desert, the publication a theme for mirth. She so lost herself, as her perception of the scale of the mistake deepened, in uplifting visions, that when her parlour maid, at eleven o'clock, opened the door she almost gave the start of guilt surprised. The girl, withdrawing for the night, had come but to say so, and her mistress, supremely wide awake and with remembrance kindled, appealed to her, after a blank stare, with intensity 'What have you done with the papers?'

'The papers, ma'am?'

'All those of this morning—don't tell me you've destroyed them! Quick, quick—bring them back.' The young woman, by a rare chance, had not destroyed them, she presently reappeared with them, neatly folded, and Mrs Hope, dismissing her with benedictions, had at last, in a few minutes, taken the time of day. She saw her impression portentously reflected in the public prints. It was not then the illusion of her jealousy—it was the triumph, un hoped for, of her justice. The reviewers observed a decorum, but, frankly, when one came to look, their stupefaction matched her own. What she had taken in the morning for enthusiasm proved mere perfunctory attention, unwarned in advance and seeking an issue for its mystification. The question was, if one liked, asked civilly, but it was asked, none the less, all round 'What *could* have made Lord Northmore's family take him for a letter writer?' Pompous and ponderous, yet loose and obscure, he managed, by a trick of his own, to be both slipshod and stiff. Who, in such a case, had been primarily responsible, and under what strangely belated advice had a group of persons destitute of wit themselves been thus deplorably led astray? With fewer accomplices in the preparation, it might almost have been assumed that they had been dealt with by practical jokers.

They had at all events committed an error of which

the most merciful thing to say was that, as founded on loyalty, it was touching. These things, in the welcome offered, lay perhaps not quite on the face, but they peeped between the lines and would force their way through on the morrow. The long quotations given were quotations marked Why?—'Why,' in other words, as interpreted by Mrs Hope, 'diag to light such helplessness of expression? why give the text of his dulness and the proof of his fatuity?' The victim of the error had certainly been, in his way and day, a useful and remarkable person, but almost any other evidence of the fact might more happily have been adduced. It rolled over her, as she paced her room in the small hours, that the wheel had come full circle. There was after all a rough justice. The monument that had overdarkened her was reared, but it would be within a week the opportunity of every humorist, the derision of intelligent London. Her husband's strange share in it continued, that night, between dreams and vigils, to puzzle her, but light broke with her final waking, which was comfortably late. She opened her eyes to it, and, as it stared straight into them, she greeted it with the first laugh that had for a long time passed her lips. How could she, idiotically, not have guessed? Warren, playing insidiously the part of a guardian, had done what he had done on purpose! He had acted to an end long foretasted, and the end—the full taste—had come.

## V

It was after this, none the less—after the other organs of criticism, including the smoking rooms of the clubs, the lobbies of the House and the dinner tables of everywhere, had duly embodied their reserves and vented their irreverence, and the unfortunate two volumes had ranged themselves beyond appeal, as a novelty insufficiently curious and prematurely stale—it was when this had come to pass that Mrs Hope really felt how beautiful her own chance would now have been and how sweet

her revenge The success of *her* volumes, for the inevitability of which nobody had had an instinct, would have been as great as the failure of Lady Northmore's, for the inevitability of which everybody had had one She read over and over her letters and asked herself afresh if the confidence that had preserved *them* might not, at such a crisis, in spite of everything, justify itself Did not the discredit to English wit, as it were, proceeding from the uncorrected attribution to an established public character of such mediocrity of thought and form, really demand, for that matter, some such redemptive stroke as the appearance of a collection of masterpieces gathered from a similar walk? To have such a collection under one's hand and yet sit and see one's self not use it was a torment through which she might well have feared to break down

But there was another thing she might do, not redemptive indeed, but perhaps, after all, as matters were going, apposite She fished out of their nook, after long years, the packet of John Northmore's epistles to herself, and, reading them over in the light of his later style, judged them to contain to the full the promise of that immutability, felt that they would deepen the impression and that, in the way of the *médit*, they constituted her supreme treasure There was accordingly a terrible week for her in which she itched to put them forth She composed mentally the preface, brief, sweet, ironic, representing her as prompted by an anxious sense of duty to a great reputation and acting upon the sight of laurels so lately gathered There would naturally be difficulties, the documents were her own, but the family, bewildered, scared, suspicious, figured to her fancy as a dog with a dust pan tied to its tail and ready for any dash to cover at the sound of the clatter of tin They would have, she surmised, to be consulted, or, if not consulted, would put in an injunction, yet of the two courses, that of scandal braved for the man she had rejected drew her on while the charm of this vision



worked, still further than that of delicacy overridden for the man she had married

The vision closed round her and she lingered on the idea—fed, as she handled again her faded fat packet, by reperusals more richly convinced. She even took opinions as to the interference open to her old friend's relatives, took, in fact, from this time on, many opinions, went out anew, picked up old threads, repaired old ruptures, resumed, as it was called, her place in society. She had not been for years so seen of men as during the few weeks that followed the abasement of the Northmores. She called, in particular, on every one she had cast out after the failure of her appeal. Many of these persons figured as Lady Northmore's contributors, the unwitting agents of the unprecedented exposure, they having, it was sufficiently clear, acted in dense good faith. Warren, foreseeing and calculating, might have the benefit of such subtlety, but it was not for any one else. With every one else—for they did, on facing her, as she said to herself, look like fools—she made inordinately free, putting right and left the question of what, in the past years, they, or their progenitors, could have been thinking of. 'What on earth had you in mind, and where, among you, were the rudiments of intelligence, when you burnt up my husband's priceless letters and clung as if for salvation to Lord Northmore's? You see how you have been saved!' The weak explanations, the imbecility, as she judged it, of the reasons given, were so much balm to her wound. The great balm, however, she kept to the last. She would go to see Lady Northmore only when she had exhausted all other comfort. That resource would be as supreme as the treasure of the fat packet. She finally went and, by a happy chance, if chance could ever be happy in such a house, was received. She remained half an hour—there were other persons present, and, on rising to go, felt that she was satisfied. She had taken in what she desired,

had sounded what she saw , only, unexpectedly, something had overtaken her more absolute than the hard need she had obeyed or the vindictive advantage she had cherished. She had counted on herself for almost anything but for pity of these people, yet it was in pity that, at the end of ten minutes, she felt everything else dissolve.

They were suddenly, on the spot, transformed for her by the depth of their misfortune, and she saw them, the great Northmores, as—of all things—consciously weak and flat. She neither made nor encountered an allusion to volumes published or frustrated, and so let her arranged inquiry die away that when, on separation, she kissed her wan sister in widowhood, it was not with the kiss of Judas. She had meant to ask lightly if she mightn't have *her* turn at editing, but the renunciation with which she re entered her house had formed itself before she left the room. When she got home indeed she at first only wept—wept for the commonness of failure and the strangeness of life. Her tears perhaps brought her a sense of philosophy, it was all as broad as it was long. When they were spent, at all events, she took out for the last time the faded fat packet. Sitting down by a receptacle daily emptied for the benefit of the dustman, she destroyed, one by one, the gems of the collection in which each piece had been a gem. She tore up, to the last scrap, Lord Northmore's letters. It would never be known now, as regards this series, either that they had been hoarded or that they had been sacrificed. And she was content so to let it rest. On the following day she began another task. She took out her husband's and attacked the business of transcription. She copied them piously, tenderly, and, for the purpose to which she now found herself settled, judged almost no omissions imperative. By the time they should be published—! She shook her head, both knowingly and resignedly, as to criticism so remote. When her transcript was finished she sent it

to a printer to set up, and then, after receiving and correcting proof, and with every precaution for secrecy, had a single copy struck off and the type, under her eyes, dispersed Her last act but one—or rather perhaps but two—was to put these sheets, which, she was pleased to find, would form a volume of three hundred pages, carefully away Her next was to add to her testamentary instrument a definite provision for the issue, after her death, of such a volume Her last was to hope that death would come in time

# ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

(1850-1894)

## WILL O' THE MILL

THE PLAIN AND THE STARS

[From *The Merry Men, and other Tales* 1887]

THE Mill where Will lived with his adopted parents stood in a falling valley between pinewoods and great mountains. Above, hill after hill soared upwards until they soared out of the depth of the hardest timber, and stood naked against the sky. Some way up, a long grey village lay like a seam or a rag of vapour on a wooded hillside, and when the wind was favourable, the sound of the church bells would drop down, thin and silvery, to Will. Below, the valley grew ever steeper and steeper, and at the same time widened out on either hand, and from an eminence beside the mill it was possible to see its whole length and away beyond it over a wide plain, where the river turned and shone, and moved on from city to city on its voyage towards the sea. It chanced that over this valley there lay a pass into a neighbouring kingdom, so that, quiet and rural as it was, the road that ran along beside the river was a high thoroughfare between two splendid and powerful societies. All through the summer, travelling-carriages came crawling up, or went plunging briskly downwards past the mill, and as it happened that the other side was very much easier of ascent, the path was not much frequented, except by people going in one direction, and of all the carriages that Will saw go by, five sixths were plunging briskly downwards and only one sixth crawling up. Much more was this the case with foot passengers. All the light footed tourists, all the pedlars laden with strange wares, were tending

downward like the river that accompanied their path Nor was this all, for when Will was yet a child a disastrous war arose over a great part of the world The newspapers were full of defeats and victories, the earth rang with cavalry hoofs, and often for days together and for miles around the coil of battle terrified good people from their labours in the field Of all this, nothing was heard for a long time in the valley, but at last one of the commanders pushed an army over the pass by forced marches, and for three days horse and foot, cannon and tumbril, drum and standard, kept pouring downward past the mill All day the child stood and watched them on their passage—the rhythmical stride, the pale, unshaven faces tanned about the eyes, the discoloured regimentals and the tattered flags, filled him with a sense of weariness, pity, and wonder, and all night long, after he was in bed, he could hear the cannon pounding and the feet trampling, and the great armament sweeping onward and downward past the mill No one in the valley ever heard the fate of the expedition, for they lay out of the way of gossip in those troublous times, but Will saw one thing plainly, that not a man returned Whither had they all gone? Whither went all the tourists and pedlars with strange wares? whither all the brisk barouches with servants in the dicky? whither the water of the stream, ever coursing downward and ever renewed from above? Even the wind blew oftener down the valley, and carried the dead leaves along with it in the fall It seemed like a great conspiracy of things animate and inanimate, they all went downward, fleetly and gaily downward, and only he, it seemed, remained behind, like a stock upon the wayside It sometimes made him glad when he noticed how the fishes kept their heads up stream They, at least, stood faithfully by him, while all else were posting downward to the unknown world

One evening he asked the miller where the river went

'It goes down the valley,' answered he, 'and turns a power of mills—six score mills, they say, from here to Unterdeck—and it none the wearier after all. And then it goes out into the lowlands, and waters the great corn country, and runs through a sight of fine cities (so they say) where kings live all alone in great palaces, with a sentry walking up and down before the door. And it goes under bridges with stone men upon them, looking down and smiling so curious at the water, and living folks leaning their elbows on the wall and looking over too. And then it goes on and on, and down through marshes and sands, until at last it falls into the sea, where the ships are that bring parrots and tobacco from the Indies. Ay, it has a long trot before it as it goes singing over our weir, bless its heart!'

'And what is the sea?' asked Will.

'The sea!' cried the miller. 'Lord help us all, it is the greatest thing God made! That is where all the water in the world runs down into a great salt lake. There it lies, as flat as my hand and as innocent like as a child, but they do say when the wind blows it gets up into water mountains bigger than any of ours, and swallows down great ships bigger than our mill, and makes such a roaring that you can hear it miles away upon the land. There are great fish in it five times bigger than a bull, and one old serpent as long as our river and as old as all the world, with whiskers like a man, and a crown of silver on her head.'

Will thought he had never heard anything like this, and he kept on asking question after question about the world that lay away down the river, with all its perils and marvels, until the old miller became quite interested himself, and at last took him by the hand and led him to the hilltop that overlooks the valley and the plain. The sun was near setting, and hung low down in a cloudless sky. Everything was defined and glorified in golden light. Will had never seen so great an expanse of country in his life, he stood and gazed

with all his eyes He could see the cities, and the woods and fields, and the bright curves of the river, and far away to where the rim of the plain trenched along the shining heavens An overmastering emotion seized upon the boy, soul and body, his heart beat so thickly that he could not breathe, the scene swam before his eyes, the sun seemed to wheel round and round, and throw off, as it turned, strange shapes which disappeared with the rapidity of thought, and were succeeded by others Will covered his face with his hands, and burst into a violent fit of tears, and the poor miller, sadly disappointed and perplexed, saw nothing better for it than to take him up in his arms and carry him home in silence

From that day forward Will was full of new hopes and longings Something kept tugging at his heart-strings, the running water carried his desires along with it as he dreamed over its fleeting surface, the wind, as it ran over innumerable tree tops, hailed him with encouraging words, branches beckoned downward, the open road, as it shouldered round the angles and went turning and vanishing fast and faster down the valley, tortured him with its solicitations He spent long whiles on the eminence, looking down the river-shed and abroad on the fat lowlands, and watched the clouds that travelled forth upon the sluggish wind and trailed their purple shadows on the plain, or he would linger by the wayside, and follow the carriages with his eyes as they rattled downward by the river It did not matter what it was, everything that went that way, were it cloud or carriage, bird or brown water in the stream, he felt his heart flow out after it in an ecstasy of longing

We are told by men of science that all the ventures of mariners on the sea, all that counter marching of tribes and races that confounds old history with its dust and rumour, sprang from nothing more abstruse than the laws of supply and demand, and a certain natural

instinct for cheap rations To any one thinking deeply, this will seem a dull and pitiful explanation The tribes that came swarming out of the North and East, if they were indeed pressed onward from behind by others, were drawn at the same time by the magnetic influence of the South and West The fame of other lands had reached them, the name of the eternal city rang in their ears, they were not colonists, but pilgrims, they travelled towards wine and gold and sunshine, but their hearts were set on something higher That divine unrest, that old stinging trouble of humanity that makes all high achievements and all miserable failure, the same that spread wings with Icarus, the same that sent Columbus into the desolate Atlantic, inspired and supported these barbarians on their perilous march There is one legend which profoundly represents their spirit, of how a flying party of these wanderers encountered a very old man shod with iron The old man asked them whither they were going, and they answered with one voice 'To the Eternal City' He looked upon them gravely 'I have sought it,' he said, 'over the most part of the world Three such pairs as I now carry on my feet have I worn out upon this pilgrimage, and now the fourth is growing slender underneath my steps And all this while I have not found the city' And he turned and went his own way alone, leaving them astonished

And yet this would scarcely parallel the intensity of Will's feeling for the plain If he could only go far enough out there, he felt as if his eyesight would be purged and clarified, as if his hearing would grow more delicate, and his very breath would come and go with luxury He was transplanted and withering where he was, he lay in a strange country and was sick for home Bit by bit, he pieced together broken notions of the world below of the river, ever moving and growing until it sailed forth into the majestic ocean, of the cities, full of brisk and beautiful people, playing fountains, bands of music and marble palaces, and lighted



up at night from end to end with artificial stars of gold , of the great churches, wise universities, brave armies, and untold money lying stored in vaults , of the high flying vice that moved in the sunshine, and the stealth and swiftness of midnight murder I have said he was sick as if for home the figure halts He was like some one lying in twilight, formless pre existence, and stretching out his hands lovingly towards many coloured, many-sounding life It was no wonder he was unhappy, he would go and tell the fish they were made for their life, wished for no more than worms and running water, and a hole below a falling bank , but he was differently designed, full of desires and aspirations, itching at the fingers, lusting with the eyes, whom the whole variegated world could not satisfy with aspects The true life, the true bright sunshine, lay far out upon the plain And O ' to see this sunlight once before he died ' to move with a jocund spirit in a golden land ! to hear the trained singers and sweet church bells, and see the holiday gardens ' ' And O fish ' ' he would cry, ' if you would only turn your noses down stream, you could swim so easily into the fabled waters and see the vast ships passing over your head like clouds, and hear the great water hills making music over you all day long ' ' But the fish kept looking patiently in their own direction, until Will hardly knew whether to laugh or cry

Hitherto the traffic on the road had passed by Will, like something seen in a picture he had perhaps exchanged salutations with a tourist, or caught sight of an old gentleman in a travelling cap at a carriage window , but for the most part it had been a mere symbol, which he contemplated from apart and with something of a superstitious feeling A time came at last when this was to be changed The miller, who was a greedy man in his way, and never forewent an opportunity of honest profit, turned the mill house into a little wayside inn, and, several pieces of good fortune falling in opportunely, built stables and got the position of post master

on the road It now became Will's duty to wait upon people, as they sat to break their fasts in the little arbour at the top of the mill garden, and you may be sure that he kept his ears open, and learned many new things about the outside world as he brought the omelette or the wine Nay, he would often get into conversation with single guests, and by adroit questions and polite attention, not only gratify his own curiosity, but win the goodwill of the travellers Many complimented the old couple on their serving boy, and a professor was eager to take him away with him, and have him properly educated in the plain The miller and his wife were mightily astonished and even more pleased They thought it a very good thing that they should have opened their inn ' You see,' the old man would remark, ' he has a kind of talent for a publican, he never would have made anything else ' And so life wagged on in the valley, with high satisfaction to all concerned but Will Every carriage that left the inn door seemed to take a part of him away with it, and when people jestingly offered him a lift, he could with difficulty command his emotion Night after night he would dream that he was awakened by flustered servants, and that a splendid equipage waited at the door to carry him down into the plain, night after night, until the dream, which had seemed all jollity to him at first, began to take on a colour of gravity, and the nocturnal summons and waiting equipage occupied a place in his mind as something to be both feared and hoped for

One day, when Will was about sixteen, a fat young man arrived at sunset to pass the night He was a contented looking fellow, with a jolly eye, and carried a knapsack While dinner was preparing, he sat in the arbour to read a book, but as soon as he had begun to observe Will, the book was laid aside, he was plainly one of those who prefer living people to people made of ink and paper Will, on his part, although he had not

been much interested in the stranger at first sight, soon began to take a great deal of pleasure in his talk, which was full of good nature and good sense, and at last conceived a great respect for his character and wisdom. They sat far into the night, and about two in the morning Will opened his heart to the young man, and told him how he longed to leave the valley and what bright hopes he had connected with the cities of the plain. The young man whistled, and then broke into a smile.

‘My young friend,’ he remarked, ‘you are a very curious little fellow to be sure, and wish a great many things which you will never get. Why, you would feel quite ashamed if you knew how the little fellows in these fairy cities of yours are all after the same sort of nonsense, and keep breaking their hearts to get up into the mountains. And let me tell you, those who go down into the plains are a very short while there before they wish themselves heartily back again. The air is not so light nor so pure, nor is the sun any brighter. As for the beautiful men and women, you would see many of them in rags and many of them deformed with horrible disorders, and a city is so hard a place for people who are poor and sensitive that many choose to die by their own hand.’

‘You must think me very simple,’ answered Will. ‘Although I have never been out of this valley, believe me, I have used my eyes. I know how one thing lives on another, for instance, how the fish hangs in the eddy to catch his fellows, and the shepherd, who makes so pretty a picture carrying home the lamb, is only carrying it home for dinner. I do not expect to find all things right in your cities. That is not what troubles me, it might have been that once upon a time, but although I live here always, I have asked many questions and learned a great deal in these last years, and certainly enough to cure me of my old fancies. But you would not have me die like a dog and not see all that is to be

seen, and do all that a man can do, let it be good or evil? you would not have me spend all my days between this road here and the river, and not so much as make a motion to be up and live my life?—I would rather die out of hand,' he cried, 'than linger on as I am doing'

'Thousands of people,' said the young man, 'live and die like you, and are none the less happy'

'Ah!' said Will, 'if there are thousands who would like, why should not one of them have my place?'

It was quite dark, there was a hanging lamp in the arbour which lit up the table and the faces of the speakers, and along the arch, the leaves upon the trellis stood out illuminated against the night sky, a pattern of transparent green upon a dusky purple. The fat young man rose, and, taking Will by the arm, led him out under the open heavens

'Did you ever look at the stars?' he asked, pointing upwards

'Often and often,' answered Will

'And do you know what they are?'

'I have fancied many things'

'They are worlds like ours,' said the young man 'Some of them less, many of them a million times greater, and some of the least sparkles that you see are not only worlds, but whole clusters of worlds turning about each other in the midst of space. We do not know what there may be in any of them, perhaps the answer to all our difficulties or the cure of all our sufferings and yet we can never reach them, not all the skill of the craftiest of men can fit out a ship for the nearest of these our neighbours, nor would the life of the most aged suffice for such a journey. When a great battle has been lost or a dear friend is dead, when we are hipped or in high spirits, there they are unweariedly shining overhead. We may stand down here, a whole army of us together, and shout until we break our hearts, and not a whisper reaches them. We may

climb the highest mountain, and we are no nearer them All we can do is to stand down here in the garden and take off our hats, the starshine lights upon our heads, and where mine is a little bald, I dare say you can see it glisten in the darkness \* The mountain and the mouse That is like to be all we shall ever have to do with Arcturus or Aldebaran Can you apply a parable ? ' he added, laying his hand upon Will's shoulder ' It is not the same thing as a reason, but usually vastly more convincing '

Will hung his head a little, and then raised it once more to heaven The stars seemed to expand and emit a sharper brilliancy, and as he kept turning his eyes higher and higher, they seemed to increase in multitude under his gaze

' I see,' he said, turning to the young man ' We are in a rat trap '

' Something of that size Did you ever see a squirrel turning in a cage ? and another squirrel sitting philosophically over his nuts ? I needn't ask you which of them looked more of a fool '

#### THE PARSON'S MARJORY

After some years the old people died, both in one winter, very carefully tended by their adopted son, and very quietly mourned when they were gone People who had heard of his roving fancies supposed he would hasten to sell the property, and go down the river to push his fortunes But there was never any sign of such an intention on the part of Will On the contrary, he had the inn set on a better footing, and hired a couple of servants to assist him in carrying it on, and there he settled down, a kind, talkative, inscrutable young man, six feet three in his stockings, with an iron constitution and a friendly voice He soon began to take rank in the district as a bit of an oddity it was not much to be wondered at from the

first, for he was always full of notions, and kept calling the plainest common sense in question, but what most raised the report upon him was the odd circumstance of his courtship with the parson's Marjory

The parson's Marjory was a lass about nineteen, when Will would be about thirty, well enough looking, and much better educated than any other girl in that part of the country, as became her parentage. She held her head very high, and had already refused several offers of marriage with a grand air, which had got her hard names among the neighbours. For all that she was a good girl, and one that would have made any man well contented.

Will had never seen much of her, for although the church and parsonage were only two miles from his own door, he was never known to go there but on Sundays. It chanced, however, that the parsonage fell into disrepair, and had to be dismantled, and the parson and his daughter took lodgings for a month or so, on very much reduced terms, at Will's inn. Now, what with the inn, and the mill, and the old miller's savings, our friend was a man of substance, and besides that, he had a name for good temper and shrewdness, which make a capital portion in marriage, and so it was currently gossiped, among their ill wishers, that the parson and his daughter had not chosen their temporary lodging with their eyes shut. Will was about the last man in the world to be cajoled or frightened into marriage. You had only to look into his eyes, limpid and still like pools of water, and yet with a sort of clear light that seemed to come from within, and you would understand at once that here was one who knew his own mind, and would stand to it immovably. Marjory herself was no weakling by her looks, with strong, steady eyes and a resolute and quiet bearing. It might be a question whether she was not Will's match in steadfastness, after all, or which of them would rule the roast in marriage. But Marjory had never given it a thought,

and accompanied her father with the most unshaken innocence and unconcern

The season was still so early that Will's customers were few and far between, but the lilacs were already flowering, and the weather was so mild that the party took dinner under the trellis, with the noise of the river in their ears and the woods ringing about them with the songs of birds. Will soon began to take a particular pleasure in these dinners. The parson was rather a dull companion, with a habit of dozing at table, but nothing rude or cruel ever fell from his lips. And as for the parson's daughter, she suited her surroundings with the best grace imaginable, and whatever she said seemed so pat and pretty that Will conceived a great idea of her talents. He could see her face, as she leaned forward, against a background of rising pinewoods, her eyes shone peaceably, the light lay around her hair like a kerchief, something that was hardly a smile rippled her pale cheeks, and Will could not contain himself from gazing on her in an agreeable dismay. She looked, even in her quietest moments, so complete in herself, and so quick with life down to her finger tips and the very skirts of her dress, that the remainder of created things became no more than a blot by comparison, and if Will glanced away from her to her surroundings, the trees looked inanimate and senseless, the clouds hung in heaven like dead things, and even the mountain tops were disenchanted. The whole valley could not compare in looks with this one girl.

Will was always observant in the society of his fellow-creatures, but his observation became almost painfully eager in the case of Marjory. He listened to all she uttered, and read her eyes, at the same time, for the unspoken commentary. Many kind, simple, and sincere speeches found an echo in his heart. He became conscious of a soul beautifully poised upon itself, nothing doubting, nothing desiring, clothed in peace. It was not possible to separate her thoughts from her appear-

ance The turn of her wrist, the still sound of her voice, the light in her eyes, the lines of her body, fell in tune with her grave and gentle words, like the accompaniment that sustains and harmonizes the voice of the singer Her influence was one thing, not to be divided or discussed, only to be felt with gratitude and joy To Will, her presence recalled something of his childhood, and the thought of her took its place in his mind beside that of dawn, of running water, and of the earliest violets and lilacs It is the property of things seen for the first time, or for the first time after long, like the flowers in spring, to reawaken in us the sharp edge of sense and that impression of mystic strangeness which otherwise passes out of life with the coming of years, but the sight of a loved face is what renews a man's character from the fountain upwards

One day after dinner Will took a stroll among the firs, a grave beatitude possessed him from top to toe, and he kept smiling to himself and the landscape as he went The river ran between the stepping stones with a pretty wimple, a bird sang loudly in the wood, the hill-tops looked immeasurably high, and as he glanced at them from time to time seemed to contemplate his movements with a beneficent but awful curiosity His way took him to the eminence which overlooked the plain, and there he sat down upon a stone, and fell into deep and pleasant thought The plain lay abroad with its cities and silver river, everything was asleep, except a great eddy of birds which kept rising and falling and going round and round in the blue air He repeated Marjory's name aloud, and the sound of it gratified his ear He shut his eyes, and her image sprang up before him, quietly luminous and attended with good thoughts The river might run for ever, the birds fly higher and higher till they touched the stars He saw it was empty bustle after all, for here, without stirring a foot, waiting patiently in his own narrow valley, he also had attained the better sunlight



The next day Will made a sort of declaration across the dinner-table, while the parson was filling his pipe

'Miss Marjory,' he said, 'I never knew any one I liked so well as you I am mostly a cold, unkindly sort of man, not from want of heart, but out of strangeness in my way of thinking, and people seem far away from me 'Tis as if there were a circle round me, which kept every one out but you, I can hear the others talking and laughing, but you come quite close Maybe, this is disagreeable to you?' he asked

Marjory made no answer

'Speak up, girl,' said the parson

'Nay, now,' returned Will, 'I wouldn't press her, parson I feel tongue-tied myself, who am not used to it, and she's a woman, and little more than a child, when all is said But for my part, as far as I can understand what people mean by it, I fancy I must be what they call in love I do not wish to be held as committing myself, for I may be wrong, but that is how I believe things are with me And if Miss Marjory should feel any otherwise on her part, mayhap she would be so kind as shake her head'

Marjory was silent, and gave no sign that she had heard

'How is that, parson?' asked Will

'The girl must speak,' replied the parson, laying down his pipe 'Here's our neighbour who says he loves you, Madge Do you love him, ay or no?'

'I think I do,' said Marjory faintly

'Well then, that's all that could be wished!' cried Will heartily And he took her hand across the table, and held it a moment in both of his with great satisfaction

'You must marry,' observed the parson, replacing his pipe in his mouth

'Is that the right thing to do, think you?' demanded Will

'It is indispensable,' said the parson

'Very well,' replied the wooer

Two or three days passed away with great delight to Will, although a bystander might scarce have found it out. He continued to take his meals opposite Marjory, and to talk with her and gaze upon her in her father's presence, but he made no attempt to see her alone, nor in any other way changed his conduct towards her from what it had been since the beginning. Perhaps the girl was a little disappointed, and perhaps not unjustly, and yet if it had been enough to be always in the thoughts of another person, and so pervade and alter his whole life, she might have been thoroughly contented. For she was never out of Will's mind for an instant. He sat over the stream, and watched the dust of the eddy, and the poised fish, and straining weeds, he wandered out alone into the purple even, with all the blackbirds piping round him in the wood, he rose early in the morning, and saw the sky turn from grey to gold, and the light leap upon the hill tops, and all the while he kept wondering if he had never seen such things before, or how it was that they should look so different now. The sound of his own mill wheel, or of the wind among the trees, confounded and charmed his heart. The most enchanting thoughts presented themselves unbidden in his mind. He was so happy that he could not sleep at night, and so restless that he could hardly sit still out of her company. And yet it seemed as if he avoided her rather than sought her out.

One day, as he was coming home from a ramble, Will found Marjory in the garden picking flowers, and as he came up with her, slackened his pace and continued walking by her side.

'You like flowers?' he said.

'Indeed I love them dearly,' she replied. 'Do you?'

'Why, no,' said he, 'not so much. They are a very small affair, when all is done. I can fancy people caring for them greatly, but not doing as you are just now.'

'How?' she asked, pausing and looking up at him.

'Plucking them,' said he 'They are a deal better off where they are, and look a deal prettier, if you go to that'

'I wish to have them for my own,' she answered, 'to carry them near my heart, and keep them in my room They tempt me when they grow here, they seem to say, "Come and do something with us," but once I have cut them and put them by, the charm is laid, and I can look at them with quite an easy heart'

'You wish to possess them,' replied Will, 'in order to think no more about them It's a bit like killing the goose with the golden eggs It's a bit like what I wished to do when I was a boy Because I had a fancy for looking out-over the plain, I wished to go down there—where I couldn't look out over it any longer Was not that fine reasoning? Dear, dear, if they only thought of it, all the world would do like me, and you would let your flowers alone, just as I stay up here in the mountains' Suddenly he broke off sharp 'By the Lord!' he cried And when she asked him what was wrong, he turned the question off, and walked away into the house with rather a humorous expression of face

He was silent at table, and after the night had fallen and the stars had come out overhead, he walked up and down for hours in the courtyard and garden with an uneven pace There was still a light in the window of Marjory's room one little oblong patch of orange in a world of dark blue hills and silver starlight Will's mind ran a great deal on the window, but his thoughts were not very lover like 'There she is in her room,' he thought, 'and there are the stars overhead—a blessing upon both!' Both were good influences in his life, both soothed and braced him in his profound contentment with the world And what more should he desire with either? The fat young man and his counsels were so present to his mind, that he threw back his head, and, putting his hands before his mouth,

shouted aloud to the populous heavens Whether from the position of his head or the sudden strain of the exertion, he seemed to see a momentary shock among the stars, and a diffusion of frosty light pass from one to another along the sky At the same instant, a corner of the blind was lifted and lowered again at once He laughed a loud ho ho ' 'One and another ' ' thought Will 'The stars tremble, and the blind goes up Why, before Heaven, what a great magician I must be ' Now if I were only a fool, should not I be in a pretty way ? ' And he went off to bed, chuckling to himself 'If I were only a fool ' '

The next morning, pretty early, he saw her once more in the garden, and sought her out

'I have been thinking about getting married,' he began abruptly, 'and after having turned it all over, I have made up my mind it's not worth while'

She turned upon him for a single moment, but his radiant, kindly appearance would, under the circumstances, have disconcerted an angel, and she looked down again upon the ground in silence He could see her tremble

'I hope you don't mind,' he went on, a little taken aback 'You ought not I have turned it all over, and upon my soul there's nothing in it We should never be one whit nearer than we are just now, and, if I am a wise man, nothing like so happy'

'It is unnecessary to go round about with me,' she said 'I very well remember that you refused to commit yourself, and now that I see you were mistaken, and in reality have never cared for me, I can only feel sad that I have been so far misled'

'I ask your pardon,' said Will stoutly, 'you do not understand my meaning As to whether I have ever loved you or not, I must leave that to others But for one thing, my feeling is not changed, and for another, you may make it your boast that you have made my whole life and character something different from what

they were I mean what I say, no less I do not think getting married is worth while I would rather you went on living with your father, so that I could walk over and see you once, or maybe twice a week, as people go to church, and then we should both be all the happier between whiles That's my notion But I'll marry you if you will,' he added

'Do you know that you are insulting me?' she broke out

'Not I, Marjory,' said he, 'if there is anything in a clear conscience, not I I offer all my heart's best affection, you can take it or want it, though I suspect it's beyond either your power or mine to change what has once been done, and set me fancy free I'll marry you, if you like, but I tell you again and again, it's not worth while, and we had best stay friends Though I am a quiet man I have noticed a heap of things in my life Trust in me, and take things as I propose, or, if you don't like that, say the word, and I'll marry you out of hand'

There was a considerable pause, and Will, who began to feel uneasy, began to grow angry in consequence

'It seems you are too proud to say your mind,' he said 'Believe me that's a pity A clean shrift makes simple living Can a man be more downright or honourable to a woman than I have been? I have said my say, and given you your choice Do you want me to marry you? or will you take my friendship, as I think best? or have you had enough of me for good? Speak out for the dear God's sake' You know your father told you a girl should speak her mind in these affairs'

She seemed to recover herself at that, turned without a word, walked rapidly through the garden, and disappeared into the house, leaving Will in some confusion as to the result He walked up and down the garden, whistling softly to himself Sometimes he stopped and contemplated the sky and hill tops, sometimes he went down to the tail of the weir and sat there,

looking foolishly in the water All this dubiety and perturbation was so foreign to his nature and the life which he had resolutely chosen for himself, that he began to regret Marjory's arrival 'After all,' he thought, 'I was as happy as a man need be I could come down here and watch my fishes all day long if I wanted, I was as settled and contented as my old mill'

Marjory came down to dinner, looking very trim and quiet, and no sooner were all three at table than she made her father a speech, with her eyes fixed upon her plate, but showing no other sign of embarrassment or distress

'Father,' she began, 'Mr Will and I have been talking things over We see that we have each made a mistake about our feelings, and he has agreed, at my request, to give up all idea of marriage, and be no more than my very good friend, as in the past You see, there is no shadow of a quarrel, and indeed I hope we shall see a great deal of him in the future, for his visits will always be welcome in our house Of course, father, you will know best, but perhaps we should do better to leave Mr Will's house for the present I believe, after what has passed, we should hardly be agreeable inmates for some days'

Will, who had commanded himself with difficulty from the first, broke out upon this into an inarticulate noise, and raised one hand with an appearance of real dismay, as if he were about to interfere and contradict But she checked him at once, looking up at him with a swift glance and an angry flush upon her cheek

'You will perhaps have the good grace,' she said, 'to let me explain these matters for myself'

Will was put entirely out of countenance by her expression and the ring of her voice He held his peace, concluding that there were some things about this girl beyond his comprehension, in which he was exactly right

The poor parson was quite crestfallen He tried to

prove that this was no more than a true lovers' tiff, which would pass off before night, and when he was dislodged from that position, he went on to argue that where there was no quarrel there could be no call for a separation, for the good man liked both his entertainment and his host. It was curious to see how the girl managed them, saying little all the time, and that very quietly, and yet twisting them round her finger and insensibly leading them wherever she would by feminine tact and generalship. It scarcely seemed to have been her doing—it seemed as if things had merely so fallen out—that she and her father took their departure that same afternoon in a farmcart, and went farther down the valley, to wait, until their own house was ready for them, in another hamlet. But Will had been observing closely, and was well aware of her dexterity and resolution. When he found himself alone he had a great many curious matters to turn over in his mind. He was very sad and solitary, to begin with. All the interest had gone out of his life, and he might look up at the stars as long as he pleased, he somehow failed to find support or consolation. And then he was in such a turmoil of spirit about Marjory. He had been puzzled and irritated at her behaviour, and yet he could not keep himself from admiring it. He thought he recognized a fine, perverse angel in that still soul which he had never hitherto suspected, and though he saw it was an influence that would fit but ill with his own life of artificial calm, he could not keep himself from ardently desiring to possess it. Like a man who has lived among shadows and now meets the sun, he was both pained and delighted.

As the days went forward he passed from one extreme to another, now pluming himself on the strength of his determination, now despising his timid and silly caution. The former was, perhaps, the true thought of his heart, and represented the regular tenor of the man's reflections, but the latter burst forth from time to time with

an unruly violence, and then he would forget all consideration, and go up and down his house and garden or walk among the fir-woods like one who is beside himself with remorse To equable, steady minded Will this state of matters was intolerable, and he determined, at whatever cost, to bring it to an end So, one warm summer afternoon he put on his best clothes, took a thorn switch in his hand, and set out down the valley by the river As soon as he had taken his determination, he had regained at a bound his customary peace of heart, and he enjoyed the bright weather and the variety of the scene without any admixture of alarm or unpleasant eagerness It was nearly the same to him how the matter turned out, If she accepted him he would have to marry her this time, which perhaps was all for the best If she refused him, he would have done his utmost, and might follow his own way in the future with an untroubled conscience He hoped, on the whole, she would refuse him, and then, again, as he saw the brown roof which sheltered her, peeping through some willows at an angle of the stream, he was half-inclined to reverse the wish, and more than half ashamed of himself for this infirmity of purpose

Marjory seemed glad to see him, and gave him her hand without affectation or delay

'I have been thinking about this marriage,' he began

'So have I,' she answered 'And I respect you more and more for a very wise man You understood me better than I understood myself, and I am now quite certain that things are all for the best as they are'

'At the same time—,' ventured Will

'You must be tired,' she interrupted 'Take a seat and let me fetch you a glass of wine The afternoon is so warm, and I wish you not to be displeased with your visit You must come quite often, once a week, if you can spare the time, I am always so glad to see my friends'

'O, very well,' thought Will to himself 'It appears



I was right after all' And he paid a very agreeable visit, walked home again in capital spirits, and gave himself no further concern about the matter

For nearly three years Will and Marjory continued on these terms, seeing each other once or twice a week without any word of love between them, and for all that time I believe Will was nearly as happy as a man can be. He rather stinted himself the pleasure of seeing her, and he would often walk half way over to the parsonage, and then back again, as if to whet his appetite. Indeed there was one corner of the road, whence he could see the church spire wedged into a crevice of the valley between sloping firwoods, with a triangular snatch of plain by way of background, which he greatly affected as a place to sit and moralize in before returning homewards, and the peasants got so much into the habit of finding him there in the twilight that they gave it the name of 'Will o' the Mill's Corner'

At the end of the three years Marjory played him a sad trick by suddenly marrying somebody else. Will kept his countenance bravely, and merely remarked that, for as little as he knew of women, he had acted very prudently in not marrying her himself three years before. She plainly knew very little of her own mind, and, in spite of a deceptive manner, was as fickle and flighty as the rest of them. He had to congratulate himself on an escape, he said, and would take a higher opinion of his own wisdom in consequence. But at heart, he was reasonably displeased, moped a good deal for a month or two, and fell away in flesh, to the astonishment of his serving-lads.

It was perhaps a year after this marriage that Will was awakened late one night by the sound of a horse galloping on the road, followed by precipitate knocking at the inn door. He opened his window and saw a farm servant, mounted and holding a led horse by the bridle, who told him to make what haste he could and go

along with him, for Marjory was dying, and had sent urgently to fetch him to her bedside. Will was no horseman, and made so little speed upon the way that the poor young wife was very near her end before he arrived. But they had some minutes' talk in private, and he was present and wept very bitterly while she breathed her last.

## DEATH

Year after year went away into nothing, with great explosions and outcries in the cities on the plain, red revolt springing up and being suppressed in blood, battle swaying hither and thither, patient astronomers in observatory towers picking out and christening new stars, plays being performed in lighted theatres, people being carried into hospital on stretchers, and all the usual turmoil and agitation of men's lives in crowded centres. Up in Will's valley only the winds and seasons made an epoch, the fish hung in the swift stream, the birds circled overhead, the pine tops rustled underneath the stars, the tall hills stood over all, and Will went to and fro, minding his wayside inn, until the snow began to thicken on his head. His heart was young and vigorous, and if his pulses kept a sober time, they still beat strong and steady in his wrists. He carried a ruddy stain on either cheek like a ripe apple, he stooped a little, but his step was still firm, and his sinewy hands were reached out to all men with a friendly pressure. His face was covered with those wrinkles which are got in open air, and which, rightly looked at, are no more than a sort of permanent sun-burning, such wrinkles heighten the stupidity of stupid faces, but to a person like Will, with his clear eyes and smiling mouth, only give another charm by testifying to a simple and easy life. His talk was full of wise sayings. He had a taste for other people, and other people had a taste for him. When the valley was full of tourists in the season, there were merry nights in

Will's arbour, and his views, which seemed whimsical to his neighbours, were often enough admired by learned people out of towns and colleges. Indeed, he had a very noble old age, and grew daily better known, so that his fame was heard of in the cities of the plain, and young men who had been summer travellers spoke together in *cafes* of Will o' the Mill and his rough philosophy. Many and many an invitation, you may be sure, he had, but nothing could tempt him from his upland valley. He would shake his head and smile over his tobacco pipe with a deal of meaning. 'You come too late,' he would answer. 'I am a dead man now. I have lived and died already. Fifty years ago you would have brought my heart into my mouth, and now you do not even tempt me. But that is the object of long living, that man should cease to care about life.' And again, 'There is only one difference between a long life and a good dinner—that, in the dinner, the sweets come last.' Or once more, 'When I was a boy, I was a bit puzzled, and hardly knew whether it was myself or the world that was curious and worth looking into. Now, I know it is myself, and stick to that.'

He never showed any symptom of frailty, but kept stalwart and firm to the last, but they say he grew less talkative towards the end, and would listen to other people by the hour in an amused and sympathetic silence. Only, when he did speak, it was more to the point and more charged with old experience. He drank a bottle of wine gladly, above all, at sunset on the hill top or quite late at night under the stars in the arbour. The sight of something attractive and unattainable seasoned his enjoyment, he would say, and he professed he had lived long enough to admire a candle all the more when he could compare it with a planet.

One night, in his seventy second year, he awoke in bed in such uneasiness of body and mind that he arose and dressed himself and went out to meditate in the

arbour It was pitch dark, without a star, the river was swollen, and the wet woods and meadows loaded the air with perfume It had thundered during the day, and it promised more thunder for the morrow A murky, stifling night for a man of seventy two! Whether it was the weather or the wakefulness, or some little touch of fever in his old limbs, Will's mind was besieged by tumultuous and crying memories His boyhood, the night with the fat young man, the death of his adopted parents, the summer days with Marjory, and many of those small circumstances, which seem nothing to another, and are yet the very gist of a man's own life to himself—things seen, words heard, looks misconstrued—arose from their forgotten corners and usurped his attention The dead themselves were with him, not merely taking part in this thin show of memory that defiled before his brain, but revisiting his bodily senses as they do in profound and vivid dreams The fat young man leaned his elbows on the table opposite, Marjory came and went with an apronful of flowers between the garden and the arbour, he could hear the old parson knocking out his pipe or blowing his resonant nose The tide of his consciousness ebbed and flowed he was sometimes half-asleep and drowned in his recollections of the past, and sometimes he was broad awake, wondering at himself But about the middle of the night he was startled by the voice of the dead miller calling to him out of the house as he used to do on the arrival of custom The hallucination was so perfect that Will sprang from his seat and stood listening for the summons to be repeated, and as he listened he became conscious of another noise besides the brawling of the river and the ringing in his feverish ears It was like the stir of horses and the creaking of harness, as though a carriage with an impatient team had been brought up upon the road before the courtyard gate At such an hour, upon this rough and dangerous pass, the supposition was no better than absurd, and Will

dismissed it from his mind, and resumed his seat upon the arbour chair, and sleep closed over him again like running water. He was once again awakened by the dead miller's call, thinner and more spectral than before, and once again he heard the noise of an equipage upon the road. And so thrice and four times, the same dream, or the same fancy, presented itself to his senses, until at length, smiling to himself as when one humours a nervous child, he proceeded towards the gate to set his uncertainty at rest.

From the arbour to the gate was no great distance, and yet it took Will some time, it seemed as if the dead thickened around him in the court, and crossed his path at every step. For, first, he was suddenly surprised by an overpowering sweetness of heliotropes, it was as if his garden had been planted with this flower from end to end, and the hot, damp night had drawn forth all their perfumes in a breath. Now the heliotrope had been Marjory's favourite flower, and since her death not one of them had ever been planted in Will's ground.

'I must be going crazy,' he thought. 'Poor Marjory and her heliotropes!'

And with that he raised his eyes towards the window that had once been hers. If he had been bewildered before, he was now almost terrified, for there was a light in the room, the window was an orange oblong as of yore, and the corner of the blind was lifted and let fall as on the night when he stood and shouted to the stars in his perplexity. The illusion only endured an instant, but it left him somewhat unmanned, rubbing his eyes and staring at the outline of the house and the black night behind it. While he thus stood, and it seemed as if he must have stood there quite a long time, there came a renewal of the noises on the road, and he turned in time to meet a stranger, who was advancing to meet him across the court. There was something like the outline of a great carriage discernible on the

road behind the stranger, and, above that, a few black pine tops, like so many plumes

'Master Will?' asked the new comer, in brief military fashion

'That same, sir,' answered Will 'Can I do anything to serve you?'

'I have heard you much spoken of, Master Will,' returned the other, 'much spoken of, and well And though I have both hands full of business, I wish to drink a bottle of wine with you in your arbour Before I go, I shall introduce myself'

Will led the way to the trellis, and got a lamp lighted and a bottle uncorked He was not altogether unused to such complimentary interviews, and hoped little enough from this one, being schooled by many disappointments A sort of cloud had settled on his wits and prevented him from remembering the strangeness of the hour He moved like a person in his sleep, and it seemed as if the lamp caught fire and the bottle came uncorked with the facility of thought Still, he had some curiosity about the appearance of his visitor, and tried in vain to turn the light into his face, either he handled the lamp clumsily, or there was a dimness over his eyes, but he could make out little more than a shadow at table with him He stared and stared at this shadow, as he wiped out the glasses, and began to feel cold and strange about the heart The silence weighed upon him, for he could hear nothing now, not even the river, but the drumming of his own arteries in his ears

'Here 's to you,' said the stranger roughly

'Here is my service, sir,' replied Will, sipping his wine, which somehow tasted oddly

'I understand you are a very positive fellow,' pursued the stranger

Will made answer with a smile of some satisfaction and a little nod

'So am I,' continued the other, 'and it is the delight of my heart to tramp on people's corns I will

have nobody positive but myself, not one I have crossed the whims, in my time, of kings and generals and great artists And what would you say,' he went on, 'if I had come up here on purpose to cross yours?'

Will had it on his tongue to make a sharp rejoinder, but the politeness of an old innkeeper prevailed, and he held his peace and made answer with a civil gesture of the hand

'I have,' said the stranger 'And if I did not hold you in a particular esteem, I should make no words about the matter It appears you pride yourself on staying where you are You mean to stick by your inn Now I mean you shall come for a turn with me in my barouche, and before this bottle's empty, so you shall'

'That would be an odd thing, to be sure,' replied Will, with a chuckle 'Why, sir, I have grown here like an old oak tree, the Devil himself could hardly root me up and for all I perceive you are a very entertaining old gentleman, I would wager you another bottle you lose your pains with me'

The dimness of Will's eyesight had been increasing all this while, but he was somehow conscious of a sharp and chilling scrutiny which irritated and yet overmastered him

'You need not think,' he broke out suddenly, in an explosive, febrile manner that startled and alarmed himself, 'that I am a stay at home, because I fear anything under God God knows I am tired enough of it all, and when the time comes for a longer journey than ever you dream of, I reckon I shall find myself prepared'

The stranger emptied his glass and pushed it away from him He looked down for a little, and then, leaning over the table tapped Will three times upon the forearm with a single finger 'The time has come!' he said solemnly

An ugly thrill spread from the spot he touched The tones of his voice were dull and startling, and echoed strangely in Will's heart

'I beg your pardon,' he said, with some discomposure 'What do you mean?'

'Look at me, and you will find your eyesight swim Raise your hand, it is dead heavy This is your last bottle of wine, Master Will, and your last night upon the earth'

'You are a doctor?' quavered Will

'The best that ever was,' replied the other, 'for I cure both mind and body with the same prescription I take away all pain and I forgive all sins, and where my patients have gone wrong in life, I smooth out all complications and set them free again upon their feet'

'I have no need of you,' said Will

'A time comes for all men,' Master Will,' replied the doctor, 'when the helm is taken out of their hands For you, because you were prudent and quiet, it has been long of coming, and you have had long to discipline yourself for its reception You have seen what is to be seen about your mill, you have sat close all your days like a hare in its form, but now that is at an end, and,' added the doctor, getting on his feet, 'you must arise and come with me'

'You are a strange physician,' said Will, looking steadfastly upon his guest

'I am a natural law,' he replied, 'and people call me Death'

'Why did you not tell me so at first?' cried Will 'I have been waiting for you these many years Give me your hand, and welcome'

'Lean upon my arm,' said the stranger, 'for already your strength abates Lean on me as heavily as you need, for though I am old, I am very strong It is but three steps to my carriage, and there all your trouble ends Why, Will,' he added, 'I have been yearning for you as if you were my own son, and of all the men that ever I came for in my long days, I have come for you most gladly I am caustic, and sometimes offend



people at first sight, but I am a good friend at heart to such as you '

' Since Marjory was taken,' returned Will, ' I declare before God you were the only friend I had to look for '

So the pair went arm in arm across the courtyard

One of the servants awoke about this time and heard the noise of horses pawing before he dropped asleep again, all down the valley that night there was a rushing as of a smooth and steady wind descending towards the plain, and when the world rose next morning, sure enough Will o' the Mill had gone at last upon his travels (1878 )

# GEORGE GISSING

(1857-1903)

## A DAUGHTER OF THE LODGE

[From *The House of Cobwebs* 1906]

FOR a score of years the Rocketts had kept the lodge of Brent Hall. In the beginning Rockett was head gardener, his wife, the daughter of a shopkeeper, had never known domestic service, and performed her duties at the Hall gates with a certain modest dignity not displeasing to the stately persons upon whom she depended. During the lifetime of Sir Henry the best possible understanding existed between Hall and lodge. Though Rockett's health broke down, and at length he could work hardly at all, their pleasant home was assured to the family, and at Sir Henry's death the nephew who succeeded him left the Rocketts undisturbed. But, under this new lordship, things were not quite as they had been. Sir Edwin Shale, a middle aged man, had in his youth made a foolish marriage, his lady ruled him, not with the gentlest of tongues, nor always to the kindest purpose, and their daughter, Hilda, asserted her rights as only child with a force of character which Sir Edwin would perhaps have more sincerely admired had it reminded him less of Lady Shale.

While the Hall, in Sir Henry's time, remained childless, the lodge prided itself on a boy and two girls. Young Rockett, something of a scapegrace, was by the baronet's advice sent to sea, and thenceforth gave his parents no trouble. The second daughter, Betsy, grew up to be her mother's help. But Betsy's elder sister showed from early years that the life of the lodge would afford no adequate scope for her ambitions. May Rockett had good looks, what was more, she had an intellect which sharpened itself on everything with which

it came in contact. The village school could never have been held responsible for May Rockett's acquirements and views at the age of ten, nor could the High School in the neighbouring town altogether account for her mental development at seventeen. Not without misgivings had the health-broken gardener and his wife consented to May's pursuit of the higher learning, but Sir Henry and the kind old Lady Shale seemed to think it the safer course, and evidently there was little chance of the girl's accepting any humble kind of employment in one way or another she must depend for a livelihood upon her brains. At the time of Sir Edwin's succession Miss Rockett had already obtained a place as governess, giving her parents to understand that this was only, of course, a temporary expedient—a paving of the way to something vaguely, but superbly, independent. Nor was promotion long in coming. At two and twenty May accepted a secretaryship to a lady with a mission—concerning the rights of womanhood. In letters to her father and mother she spoke much of the importance of her work, but did not confess how very modest was her salary. A couple of years went by without her visiting the old home, then, of a sudden, she made known her intention of coming to stay at the lodge 'for a week or ten days'. She explained that her purpose was rest, intellectual strain had begun rather to tell upon her, and a few days of absolute tranquillity, such as she might expect under the elms of Brent Hall, would do her all the good in the world. 'Of course,' she added, 'it's unnecessary to say anything about me to the Shale people. They and I have nothing in common, and it will be better for us to ignore each other's existence.'

These characteristic phrases troubled Mr and Mrs Rockett. That the family at the Hall should, if it seemed good to them, ignore the existence of May was, in the Rocketts' view, reasonable enough, but for May to ignore Sir Edwin and Lady Shale, who were just now in residence after six months spent abroad, struck them

as a very grave impropriety. Natural respect demanded that, at some fitting moment, and in a suitable manner, their daughter should present herself to her feudal superiors, to whom she was assuredly indebted, though indirectly, for 'the blessings she enjoyed'. This was Mrs. Rockett's phrase, and the rheumatic, wheezy old gardener uttered the same opinion in less conventional language. They had no affection for Sir Edwin or his lady, and Miss Hilda they decidedly disliked, their treatment at the hands of these new people contrasted unpleasantly enough with the memory of old times, but a spirit of loyal subordination ruled their blood, and, to Sir Edwin at all events, they felt gratitude for their retention at the lodge. Mrs. Rockett was a healthy and capable woman of not more than fifty, but no less than her invalid husband would she have dreaded the thought of turning her back on Brent Hall. Rockett had often consoled himself with the thought that here he should die, here amid the fine old trees that he loved, in the ivy covered house which was his only idea of home. And was it not a reasonable hope that Betsy, good steady girl, should some day marry the promising young gardener whom Sir Edwin had recently taken into his service, and so re-establish the old order of things at the lodge?

'I half wish May wasn't coming,' said Mrs. Rockett, after long and anxious thought. 'Last time she was here she quite upset me with her strange talk.'

'She's a funny girl, and that's the truth,' muttered Rockett from his old leather chair, full in the sunshine of the kitchen window. They had a nice little sitting-room, but this, of course, was only used on Sunday, and no particular idea of comfort attached to it. May, to be sure, had always used the sitting room. It was one of the habits which emphasized most strongly the moral distance between her and her parents.

The subject being full of perplexity, they put it aside, and with very mixed feelings awaited their elder

daughter's arrival. Two days later a cab deposited at the lodge Miss May, and her dress basket, and her travelling bag, and her holdall, together with certain loose periodicals and a volume or two bearing the yellow label of Mudie. The young lady was well dressed in a severely practical way, nothing unduly feminine marked her appearance, and in the matter of collar and necktie she inclined to the example of the other sex, for all that, her soft complexion and bright eyes, her well-turned figure and light, quick movements, had a picturesque value which Miss May certainly did not ignore. She manifested no excess of feeling when her mother and sister came forth to welcome her, a nod, a smile, an offer of her cheek, and the pleasant exclamation, 'Well, good people!' carried her through this little scene with becoming dignity.

'You will bring these things inside, please,' she said to the driver, in her agreeable head voice, with the tone and gesture of one who habitually gives orders.

Her father, bent with rheumatism, stood awaiting her just within. She grasped his hand cordially, and cried on a cheery note, 'Well, father, how are you getting on? No worse than usual, I hope?' Then she added, regarding him with her head slightly aside, 'We must have a talk about your case. I've been going in a little for medicine lately. No doubt your country medico is a duffer. Sit down, sit down, and make yourself comfortable. I don't want to disturb any one. About teatime, isn't it, mother? Tea very weak for me, please, and a slice of lemon with it, if you have such a thing, and just a mouthful of dry toast.'

So unwilling was May to disturb the habits of the family that, half an hour after her arrival, the homely three had fallen into a state of nervous agitation, and could neither say nor do anything natural to them. Of a sudden there sounded a sharp rapping at the window. Mrs. Rockett and Betsy started up, and Betsy ran to the door. In a moment or two she came back with glowing cheeks

'I'm sure I never heard the bell!' she exclaimed with compunction 'Miss Shale had to get off her bicycle!'

'Was it she who hammered at the window?' asked May coldly

'Yes—and she was that annoyed'

'It will do her good. A little anger now and then is excellent for the health.' And Miss Rockett sipped her lemon tinctured tea with a smile of ineffable contempt.

The others went to bed at ten o'clock, but May, having made herself at ease in the sitting room, sat there reading until after twelve. Nevertheless she was up very early next morning, and, before going out for a sharp little walk (in a heavy shower), she gave precise directions about her breakfast. She wanted only the simplest things, prepared in the simplest way, but the tone of her instructions vexed and perturbed Mrs Rockett sorely. After breakfast the young lady made a searching inquiry into the state of her father's health, and diagnosed his ailments in such learned words that the old gardener began to feel worse than he had done for many a year. May then occupied herself with correspondence, and before midday sent her sister out to post nine letters.

'But I thought you were going to rest yourself?' said her mother, in an irritable voice quite unusual with her.

'Why, so I am resting!' May exclaimed. 'If you saw my ordinary morning's work! I suppose you have a London newspaper? No? How do you live without it? I must run into the town for one this afternoon.'

The town was three miles away, but could be reached by train from the village station. On reflection, Miss Rockett announced that she would use this opportunity for calling on a lady whose acquaintance she desired to make, one Mrs Lindley, who in social position stood on an equality with the family at the Hall, and was often seen there. On her mother's expressing surprise, May smiled indulgently.

'Why shouldn't I know Mrs Lindley? I have heard she's interested in a movement which occupies me a good deal just now. I know she will be delighted to see me. I can give her a good deal of first hand information, for which she will be grateful. You *do* amuse me, mother,' she added in her blindest tone. 'When will you come to understand what my position is?'

The Rocketts had put aside all thoughts of what they esteemed May's duty towards the Hall, they earnestly hoped that her stay with them might pass unobserved by Lady and Miss Shale, whom, they felt sure, it would be positively dangerous for the girl to meet. Mrs Rockett had not slept for anxiety on this score. The father was also a good deal troubled, but his wonder at May's bearing and talk had, on the whole, an agreeable preponderance over the uneasy feeling. He and Betsy shared a secret admiration for the brilliant qualities which were flashed before their eyes, they privately agreed that May was more of a real lady than either the baronet's hard tongued wife or the disdainful Hilda Shale.

So Miss Rockett took the early afternoon train, and found her way to Mrs Lindley's, where she sent in her card. At once admitted to the drawing-room, she gave a rapid account of herself, naming persons whose acquaintance sufficiently recommended her. Mrs Lindley was a good humoured, chatty woman, who had a lively interest in everything 'progressive', a new religion or a new cycling costume stirred her to just the same kind of happy excitement, she had no prejudices, but a decided preference for the society of healthy, high-spirited, well to do people. Miss Rockett's talk was exactly what she liked, for it glanced at innumerable topics of the 'advanced' sort, was much concerned with personalities, and avoided all tiresome precision of argument.

'Are you making a stay here?' asked the hostess.

'Oh! I am with my people in the country—not far

off,' May answered in an offhand way ' Only for a day or two '

Other callers were admitted, but Miss Rockett kept the lead in talk, she glowed with self-satisfaction, feeling that she was really showing to great advantage, and that everybody admired her. When the door again opened the name announced was 'Miss Shale.' Stopping in the middle of a swift sentence, May looked at the new comer, and saw that it was indeed Hilda Shale, of Brent Hall, but this did not disconcert her. Without lowering her voice she finished what she was saying, and ended in a mirthful key. The baronet's daughter had come into town on her bicycle, as was declared by the short skirt, easy jacket, and Brown shoes, which well displayed her athletic person. She was a tall, strongly built girl of six and twenty, with a face of hard comeliness and magnificent tawny hair. All her movements suggested vigour, she shook hands with a downward jerk, moved about the room with something of a stride and, in sitting down, crossed her legs abruptly.

From the first her look had turned with surprise to Miss Rockett. When, after a minute or two, the hostess presented that young lady to her, Miss Shale raised her eyebrows a little, smiled in another direction, and gave a just perceptible nod. May's behaviour was as nearly as possible the same.

'Do you cycle, Miss Rockett?' asked Mrs. Landley.

'No, I don't. The fact is, I have never found time to learn.'

A lady remarked that nowadays there was a certain distinction in not cycling, whereupon Miss Shale's abrupt and rather metallic voice sounded what was meant for gentle irony.

'It's a pity the machines can't be sold cheaper. A great many people who would like to cycle don't feel able to afford it, you know. One often hears of such cases out in the country, and it seems awfully hard lines, doesn't it?'



Miss Rockett felt a warmth ascending to her ears and made a violent effort to look unconcerned. She wished to say something, but could not find the right words, and did not feel altogether sure of her voice. The hostess, who made no personal application of Miss Shale's remark, began to discuss the prices of bicycles, and others chimed in. May fretted under this turn of the conversation. Seeing that it was not likely to revert to subjects in which she could shine, she rose and offered to take leave.

'Must you really go?' fell with conventional regret from the hostess's lips.

'I'm afraid I must,' Miss Rockett replied, bracing herself under the converging eyes and feeling not quite equal to the occasion. 'My time is so short, and there are so many people I wish to see.'

As she left the house, anger burned in her. It was certain that Hilda Shale would make known her circumstances. She had fancied this revelation a matter of indifference, but, after all, the thought stung her intolerably. The insolence of the creature, with her hint about the prohibitive cost of bicycles! All the harder to bear because hitting the truth. May would have long ago bought a bicycle had she been able to afford it. Straying about the main streets of the town, she looked flushed and wrathful, and could think of nothing but her humiliation.

To make things worse, she lost count of time, and presently found that she had missed the only train by which she could return home. A cab would be too much of an expense, she had no choice but to walk the three or four miles. The evening was close, walking rapidly, and with the accompaniment of vexatious thoughts, she reached the gates of the Hall tired, perspiring, irritated. Just as her hand was on the gate a bicycle bell trilled vigorously behind her, and, from a distance of twenty yards, a voice cried imperatively—

'Open the gate, please!'

Miss Rockett looked round, and saw Hilda Shale slowly wheeling forward, in expectation that way would be made for her. Deliberately May passed through the side entrance, and let the little gate fall to.

Miss Shale dismounted, admitted herself, and spoke to May (now at the lodge door) with angry emphasis.

'Didn't you hear me ask you to open?'

'I couldn't imagine you were speaking to *me*,' answered Miss Rockett, with brisk dignity. 'I supposed some servant of yours was in sight.'

A peculiar smile distorted Miss Shale's full red lips. Without another word she mounted her machine and rode away up the elm avenue.

Now Mrs. Rockett had seen this encounter, and heard the words exchanged. She was lost in consternation.

'What *do* you mean by behaving like that, May? Why, I was running out myself to open, and then I saw you were there, and, of course, I thought you'd do it. There's the second time in two days Miss Shale has had to complain about us. How *could* you forget yourself, to behave and speak like that! Why, you must be crazy, my girl!'

'I don't seem to get on very well here, mother,' was May's reply. 'The fact is, I'm in a false position. I shall go to-morrow morning, and there won't be any more trouble.'

Thus spoke Miss Rockett, as one who shakes off a petty annoyance—she knew not that the serious trouble was just beginning. A few minutes later Mrs. Rockett went up to the Hall, bent on humbly apologizing for her daughter's impertinence. After being kept waiting for a quarter of an hour she was admitted to the presence of the housekeeper, who had a rather grave announcement to make.

'Mrs. Rockett, I'm sorry to tell you that you will have to leave the lodge. My lady allows you two months, though, as your wages have always been paid monthly, only a month's notice is really called for

I believe some allowance will be made you, but you will hear about that. The lodge must be ready for its new occupants on the last day of October.'

The poor woman all but sank. She had no voice for protest or entreaty—a sob choked her, and blindly she made her way to the door of the room, then to the exit from the Hall.

'What in the world is the matter?' cried May, hearing from the sitting room, whither she had retired, a clamour of distressful tongues.

She came into the kitchen, and learnt what had happened.

'And now I hope you're satisfied!' exclaimed her mother, with tearful wrath. 'You've got us turned out of our home—you've lost us the best place a family ever had—and I hope it's a satisfaction to your conceited, overbearing mind! If you'd *tried* for it you couldn't have gone to work better. And much *you* care! We're below you, we are, we're like dirt under your feet! And your father'll go and end his life who knows where, miserable as miserable can be, and your sister'll have to go into service, and as for me—'

'Listen, mother!' shouted the girl, her eyes flashing and every nerve of her body strung. 'If the Shales are such contemptible wretches as to turn you out just because they're offended with *me*, I should have thought you'd have spirit enough to tell them what you think of such behaviour, and be glad never more to serve such brutes! Father, what do *you* say? I'll tell you how it was.'

She narrated the events of the afternoon, amid sobs and ejaculations from her mother and Betsy Rockett, who was just now in anguish of lumbago, tried to straighten himself in his chair before replying, but sank helplessly together with a groan.

'You can't help yourself, May,' he said at length. 'It's your nature, my girl. Don't worry. I'll see Sir Edwin, and perhaps he'll listen to me. It's the women

who make all the mischief I must try to see Sir Edwin—'

A pang across the loins made him end abruptly, groaning, moaning, muttering. Before the renewed attack of her mother May retreated into the sitting room, and there passed an hour wretchedly enough. A knock at the door without words called her to supper, but she had no appetite, and would not join the family circle. Presently the door opened, and her father looked in.

'Don't worry, my girl,' he whispered. 'I'll see Sir Edwin in the morning.'

May uttered no reply. Vaguely repenting what she had done, she at the same time rejoiced in the recollection of her passage of arms with Miss Shale, and was inclined to despise her family for their pusillanimous attitude. It seemed to her very improbable that the expulsion would really be carried out. Lady Shale and Hilda meant, no doubt, to give the Rocketts a good fright, and then contemptuously pardon them. She, in any case, would return to London without delay, and make no more trouble. A pity she had come to the lodge at all, it was no place for one of her spirit and her attainments.

In the morning she packed. The train which was to take her back to town left at half past ten, and after breakfast she walked into the village to order a cab. Her mother would scarcely speak to her, Betsy was continually in reproachful tears. On coming back to the lodge she saw her father hobbling down the avenue, and walked towards him to ask the result of his supplication. Rockett had seen Sir Edwin, but only to hear his sentence of exile confirmed. The baronet said he was sorry, but could not interfere, the matter lay in Lady Shale's hands, and Lady Shale absolutely refused to hear any excuses or apologies for the insult which had been offered her daughter.

'It's all up with us,' said the old gardener, who was

pale and trembling after his great effort 'We must go But don't worry, my girl, don't worry'

Then fright took hold upon May Rockett She felt for the first time what she had done Her heart fluttered in an anguish of self reproach, and her eyes strayed as if seeking help A minute's hesitation, then, with all the speed she could make, she set off up the avenue towards the Hall

Presenting herself at the servants' entrance, she begged to be allowed to see the housekeeper Of course her story was known to all the domestics, half a dozen of whom quickly collected to stare at her, with more or less malicious smiles It was a bitter moment for Miss Rockett, but she subdued herself, and at length obtained the interview she sought With a cold air of superiority and of disapproval the housekeeper listened to her quick, broken sentences Would it be possible, May asked, for her to see Lady Shale? She desired to—to apologize for—for rudeness of which she had been guilty, rudeness in which her family had no part, which they utterly deplored, but for which they were to suffer severely

'If you could help me, ma'am, I should be very grateful—indeed I should—'

Her voice all but broke into a sob That 'ma'am' cost her a terrible effort, the sound of it seemed to smack her on the ears

'If you will go into the servants' hall and wait,' the housekeeper deigned to say, after reflecting, 'I'll see what can be done'

And Miss Rockett submitted In the servants' hall she sat for a long, long time, observed, but never addressed The hour of her train went by More than once she was on the point of rising and fleeing, more than once her smouldering wrath all but broke into flame But she thought of her father's pale, pain-stricken face, and sat on

At something past eleven o'clock a footman ap-

proached her, and said curtly, ' You are to go up to my lady, follow me ' May followed, shaking with weakness and apprehension, burning at the same time with pride all but in revolt Conscious of nothing on the way, she found herself in a large room, where sat the two ladies, who for some moments spoke together about a topic of the day placidly Then the elder seemed to become aware of the girl who stood before her

' You are Rockett's elder daughter ? '

Oh, the metallic voice of Lady Shale ! How gratified she would have been could she have known how it bruised the girl's pride !

' Yes, my lady—'

' And why do you want to see me ? '

' I wish to apologize—most sincerely—to your ladyship—for my behaviour of last evening—'

' Oh, indeed ! ' the listener interrupted contemptuously ' I am glad you have come to your senses But your apology must be offered to Miss Shale—if my daughter cares to listen to it '

May had foreseen this It was the bitterest moment of her ordeal Flushing scarlet, she turned towards the younger woman

' Miss Shale, I beg your pardon for what I said yesterday—I beg you to forgive my rudeness—my impertinence—'

Her voice would go no further, there came a choking sound Miss Shale allowed her eyes to rest triumphant'y for an instant on the troubled face and figure, then remarked to her mother—

' It's really nothing to me, as I told you I suppose this person may leave the room now ? '

It was fated that May Rockett should go through with her purpose and gain her end But fate alone (which meant in this case the subtlest preponderance of one impulse over another) checked her on the point of a burst of passion which would have startled Lady Shale and Miss Hilda out of their cold blooded complacency

In the silence May's blood gurgled at her ears, and she tottered with dizziness

'You may go,' said Lady Shale

But May could not move There flashed across her the terrible thought that perhaps she had humiliated herself for nothing

'My lady—I hope—will your ladyship please to forgive my father and mother? I entreat you not to send them away We shall all be so grateful to your ladyship if you will overlook—'

'That will do,' said Lady Shale decisively 'I will merely say that the sooner you leave the lodge the better, and that you will do well never again to pass the gates of the Hall You may go'

Miss Rockett withdrew Outside, the footman was awaiting her He looked at her with a grin, and asked in an undertone, 'Any good?' But May, to whom this was the last blow, rushed past him, lost herself in corridors, ran wildly hither and thither, tears streaming from her eyes, and was at length guided by a maid-servant into the outer air Fleeing she cared not whither she came at length into a still corner of the park, and there, hidden amid trees, watched only by birds and rabbits, she wept out the bitterness of her soul

By an evening train she returned to London, not having confessed to her family what she had done, and suffering still from some uncertainty as to the result A day or two later Betsy wrote to her the happy news that the sentence of expulsion was withdrawn, and peace reigned once more in the ivy covered lodge By that time Miss Rockett had all but recovered her self-respect, and was so busy in her secretaryship that she could only scribble a line of congratulation She felt that she had done rather a meritorious thing, but, for the first time in her life, did not care to boast of it.

# MARY COLERIDGE

(1861-1907)

## THE FRIENDLY FOE

[From *Gathered Leaves* 1910]

'Not for a moment' said the Count, with great dignity, 'did I suppose so'

I thanked him

He pressed my hand

There followed one of those awkward pauses which are apt to follow on a supreme moment. He had just informed me that he did not for an instant suppose that I preferred any consideration before honour. The wind was driving the rain against my window as if it were a human thing that must be chased from the wide world without. The flames were leaping up the chimney, as if they owned some kinship with the wind and were rushing to meet him. I wanted to be alone, to enjoy the uproar in peace. How to get rid of the Count I did not know. Why the Count insisted on staying, I did not know. As he was going to shoot me, or I was going to shoot him, at eight o'clock the next morning, it seemed to me that this was waste of time, but you cannot make a remark of that kind to a guest, and he happened to be in my room.

'Let me ask you one thing,' said the Count. 'You are a generous enemy. Though not in your first youth, you are younger than I am, and you have not been out before. I would not take you at a disadvantage. Do you believe in the soul's future?'

'A most unnecessary question,' I said lightly. 'In a few hours one of us will have answered it for good and all.'

He frowned.

'You do not believe in it. I am reduced to a most



unpleasant extremity Unless you can reassure me upon this point, it is impossible for me to fight you Unless I fight you, I am dishonoured'

'Why should it be impossible?' I asked But that the Count was by birth and breeding a perfect gentleman I might have suspected his courage

'It gives me an unfair advantage,' he said, gazing steadily at me out of his deep set eyes 'You fight, believing death is death I fight, believing death is birth I know something of your chivalrous nature If I kill you, I, in my own opinion, set free a soul If you kill me, you, in your own opinion, commit murder I would not have you tortured in after life by this reflection Once more I tell you, it is impossible for me to fight unless you give me some assurance Once more I ask you, Do you believe in eternal life?'

'I am fully sensible of your kind consideration for my feelings, but permit me to observe that I do not see what right you have to ask that question'

'You decline to answer it?'

'I do'

'Then our affair is settled I also decline to fight'

He bowed, and walked towards the door

'Stay!' I cried 'What are you going to do?'

He laid his hand upon a pistol

'No,' I said 'Why?'

'You leave me no other choice'

It was absurd of me to object to his shooting himself when I had no objection whatever to shooting him with my own hand if I could But it was just this one phrase *if I could* that made a difference The alternative was too cold-blooded, I felt bound to prevent it

'Could it not be arranged——?' I spoke nervously, only to gain time, in the confusion of the moment

'You are not the man I took you for,' he said

This time he did not bow as he turned towards the door

'You do not seem to be aware,' I remarked, 'that you

are exposing me to a sense of blood guiltiness far more onerous than that which you deprecate. If I am to be a murderer, at least allow me to feel that I did the deed myself, not that I compelled some one else to do it. Do you think that you are treating me fairly? You put a premium upon lies. You leave no other course open to me. By all that is held most sacred I swear to you that I believe in eternal life.

And rising, I laid my hand upon my heart.

'Sir,' said the Count sternly, 'would you die with a falsehood on your lip? You do not believe it?'

'No,' I said, 'I do not. I merely wished to show you to what extremes you are driving me. But you are right. Between gentlemen this sort of thing is a mistake, even in jest. You do not leave this room till you have promised to fight me to-morrow!' and I threw myself across the door. I was the younger and the stronger man.

With perfect gravity the Count sat down in an arm-chair. The wind was howling more loudly than before, the flames had sunk lower.

I became conscious of the absurdity of the situation. Nothing short of flood, fire, or earthquake could put an end to it in a fitting manner. There we were bound to stay till we died of starvation, unless one or the other would compromise his dignity. As the little I knew of the Count made me feel certain that nothing would ever induce him to compromise his, I compromised mine.

'Count,' I said, 'this is a ridiculous position for both of us. My presence causes you an intolerable *gêne*, and yours, the whole night through, would scarcely be agreeable to me. Let us consider the thing dispassionately. You will not fight me because I do not hold an opinion which you, rightly or wrongly, hold to be necessary for my future happiness, if I live, and you do not object to kill me, because you think no one can die, but you do object to poison the remainder of my mortal existence

If you do not fight me, you will shoot yourself, for you would be unable to survive your honour. That is the case on your side. Now for mine. I have an instinctive dislike of suicide, either for myself or for any one else whom I respect. It may be a mere prejudice, but so it is. If, therefore, you blow out your brains, it will seriously affect my peace of mind, inasmuch as I shall consider myself to a certain extent responsible. But fair fight is another thing altogether. It is now five o'clock. According to our agreement we meet at eight to-morrow morning. I shall need at least five hours' sleep beforehand, or I shall not take steady aim. Allowing full time to dress, breakfast, and get to the *rendez-vous*, I ought not to go to bed later than two. Between five o'clock this evening and two to-morrow morning there are nine hours. Now, these nine hours I will promise you, on my word of honour as a gentleman, to spend on the investigation of a question that does not interest me in the least, and on which, but for you, I should never, in the whole course of my life, have spent nine minutes—if you, on your part, will promise to meet me at eight to-morrow. If, by that time, I can answer your question in the affirmative—and I know already that it is not by words alone that you will judge whether I speak the truth—well and good! Let us fight! Whichever way the duel ends, you will have the satisfaction of thinking that I have gained a belief which, but for you, I should not even have wished to gain. If, on the contrary, I retain my present scepticism, we will shoot ourselves instead of each other. *Voilà tout!* It is a pity the country will lose two possible defenders instead of one, but I do not see how that can be helped. Is it a bond? Will you meet me at eight?'

The Count rose from his chair. His eyes shone.

'I have the greatest pleasure in accepting your generous proposal,' he replied, 'more especially as I am quite convinced that no one could study this question for nine hours without answering it as I myself have

been taught to answer it As for the method of study, that of course must be left to yourself The "Phaidon" of Plato'—

'No,' I said carelessly, moving away from the door to let him pass 'My tastes are not philosophical I shall sit by the fire for three hours, and think it over in my own way (I dare not engage that my mind will not wander to other subjects La Girouette danced adorably in the ballet last night) Then, if you have no objection, I shall dine out and go to a ball, the invitation for which I accepted some time ago, so that my absence would be remarked and, when the clock strikes eleven, I shall betake myself to my confessor If serious reflection, if the sight of the vanities of this world, if the consolation of religion, all put together, cannot persuade me to believe in the immortality of the soul, it will be a hopeless affair indeed, for I am sure nothing else could'

The Count sighed

'It is a strange way to take,' he said, 'but let no man judge for another I myself was led to believe by a series of events which, to any other than myself, would appear almost incredible I pray that you may be rightly directed In the meantime I wish you good-night I shall not retire to rest before two o'clock' He bowed again and went out

When he was gone I threw myself down in the chair which he had occupied, that I might enjoy to the full the luxury of being alone The Count's presence had become a hideous oppression to me during the last quarter of an hour I had felt as if he would never go—as if he were a nightmare, as if he were the Old Man of the Sea, as if he were a whole crowd of people in himself, and made the room stuffy I ran to the window and flung it open, the wind rushed in and puffed the curtains out, and rioted amongst my books and papers, bathing me, body and soul, in freedom I heaped up faggot after faggot, and stirred them into a blaze that

might have set the chimney on fire Then, between wind and flame, down I sat, according to contract, to consider that part of myself which was more subtle than either

I found it to the full as difficult as I had expected The old arguments were no newer 'We should like to go on living very much Therefore we think we shall But as we really do not know, we will not die till the last possible moment' They came to little more than that, so it seemed As I was without this strong prepossession in favour of life, I failed to recognize their cogency Besides, to have that man going on for ever? I had a strong prepossession in favour of his extinction, even if it necessarily included my own I loved myself less than I hated him Not that I had any reason to hate him He was everything that he should be, which gave a sort of zest to my abhorrence, reduced it to a fine art—made it essential, not a mere accident Our natures were antagonistic I could have forgiven another for murdering me more easily than I could forgive him the fact of his existence in the same universe with myself He jarred upon my every nerve My eyes rebelled at the sight of his face, my ears at the sound of his voice, the touch of his hand caused an electric shiver of repulsion He annihilated all but the animal part of me, when he was in the room I knew his dog had more of a soul than I And, by the strangest freak of fancy, it was this man who, more than any one I ever met, had the faculty of conjuring anything like it out of me, who insisted not only on my believing it was there, but that it would go on being there for ever and ever

'No, Count,' I said, as I watched the sparks go up the chimney, 'keep your immortality to yourself' I would not share it with you for the asking,' and through my mind there flashed the old emblems of the transitoriness of life—the dream, the shadow, the morning mist, the snowflake, the flower of the grass, the bird flying out of the darkness, through the lighted hall, into the darkness again I was reassured concerning its momentary char-

acter 'And yet,' I said to myself, 'the Count has a very strong will. If any man had the power to insist on living, in defiance of all the rules of Nature, that man would be the Count. Perhaps it is his excessive vitality which is burdensome to ephemeral creatures like myself. It is as if he absorbed their proper part whenever he came near them.'

So thinking, I took out my pistols and cleaned them, not without a certain pleasure. I had had enough of my own society by the time the clock struck eight, and was well inclined to seek that of others.

The dinner to which I was invited was given by Princess X, who lived in an apartment on the third floor of the Hotel Z. She was going to a dance that night—the same that I meant to attend—and the party beforehand would be, she informed me, quite a small one, consisting only of myself and a few intimates. It so happened that I was rather late. Seeing the door of the lift open, I got in. The darkness had prevented me from noticing that in one corner there was already something that looked like a downy ball of white, with a very small head coming out of it. I would fain have beaten a retreat, but it was too late, the porter stepped in after me and we began to ascend.

'Oh!' said the little lady, with a gasp, putting out a small white hand to catch hold of me. I am afraid that I did not attempt to reassure her. It was all over in a minute.

The lift stopped. I made way for her to get out. She turned round to me, smiling and blushing.

'I beg your pardon,' she said, 'I never have been in one before. It is so unlike anything else—when you are not accustomed. I suppose you also are going to dine with *Marraine*?'

'I have not the pleasure of calling the Princess X *Marraine*,' I replied, 'but if she has the pleasure of calling you her godchild, we are bound for one destination. Allow me to ring the bell.'

As she passed into the hall, the clearer light shone, for a moment, on her soft brown curls, and glanced, reflected, in her mirthful eyes

We entered the drawing-room almost at the same moment As the Princess rose to make us acquainted, she laughed again and said quickly

'No, no, Marraine, it is too late I was introduced by the lift, as the greatest coward this gentleman has ever known, quite three minutes ago'

The Princess took her hand

'Well! well!' she said, 'was there ever such a naughty débutante? It is a pity, as you took each other up so pleasantly, that you cannot take each other down also But there I must interfere'

'It is cruel of you, Princess Fate was much kinder But,'—I turned to the younger lady—'may I presume to ask your hand for the first dance?'

'You may,' she said merrily, 'but I hope you know what you are asking It is the first dance that I have ever given any one'

'Where is your father?' asked the Princess

'Kept at home by a letter from the Prime Minister He begs that you will excuse him, for nothing else would he have given up this party He is coming later on, to take me home I hope he will not come till very late indeed, if that is all he cares for He did not feel sure that it was meet for me to go out to dinner alone, even to the house of my godmother, but he said that he did not want to disappoint you, and I think,' she put in candidly, though very demurely, 'he did not want to disappoint me either I should have died of vexation if I had had to stay at home'

The Princess laughed

'That makes it serious And seriously, my love, you are quite right Unless one is dead or dying, one should keep one's dinner engagement And, while I think of it,' she added, addressing herself to me, 'I must positively engage you to dine with me to-morrow I expect the

Prime Minister, and I cannot be left alone to entertain him Eight o'clock, do you hear? He will have to leave early, so mind you are in time'

'To hear is to obey Unless I am dead or dying I will keep my dinner engagement' "

'I think I am sure of you then You never looked better in your life'

'Dinner is on the table,' said the Princess's butler

The ground floor of the hotel had been engaged for the dance The fiddles were already striking up when I, in company with the other gentlemen of the party, entered the room My promised partner was standing beside the Princess, busily inscribing the names of various aspirants on her card I thought she might be better employed inscribing mine, and said so She gave me the card, and I availed myself of the vacant spaces that appeared on it

'Quick, quick!' she cried 'There is the music! Are you not longing to be off?'

Dancing varies inversely as the character of the lady who dances With her it resembled nothing so much as flight She scarcely seemed to touch the ground with her feet, she was as light as one of the feathers on her cloak The music mounted to my brain as we went whirling round and round together I felt as though I were a spirit chasing another spirit I forgot everything else, and when it stopped I could not have told whether we had been dancing hours or moments I had begun in another state of existence

'Ah!' she said, 'your step goes well with mine'

How I filled up the intervals when I was not dancing with her I do not know Once, while we were standing together in the recess formed by a window, a great moth flew in and made for the lighted candelabra over our heads There was a quick change in her

'O save it, save it!' she cried, clasping her little hands together in wild distress

I caught the creature in my handkerchief and let it



out again When I returned to her she was pale and trembling

'He is quite safe,' I said 'Do not be unhappy' After all, what would it matter if he did burn himself? In proportion, he would have lived much longer than we shall'

'No, no,' she said 'We live for ever'

Her words sent a thrill of recollection through me

'Do we?' I said in a gentler voice 'If you tell me so, I will believe it'

'Why yes, of course we do!' she said 'I never heard any one say that we did not Shall we finish this dance?'

It was the last opportunity that I had of talking to her I think I was engaged in conversation with some one else when, later on in the evening, I heard her pleading tones close behind me

'Only one more! O let me stay for only one more!'

In an instant she was at my side

'I must go,' she said 'I must have one more dance before I go I do not know where my partner is'

It was irresistible, though I had a humiliating sensation that she asked me only because there was no one else at hand She broke away just when the delirium of enjoyment was at its height

'No longer!' she cried 'Not a moment more! That was perfect Good night!'

She made me a tricky sign of adieu with her fan, and tripped away, she could hardly help dancing as she moved

I stood bewildered for a moment, then rushed to the door that I might see her as she passed to her carriage She was leaning on her father's arm as she went down the steps The link man raised his torch to guide them, and a sudden glare of light showed me the features of the Count

I drew a long breath

'It is as well that I am going to fight that man to-morrow,' I thought 'If not, he would inevitably have

been my father in law In the first place, I have not enough to marry upon, in the second, we should have made the little thing miserable between us'

The wind detached a fragment of her swansdown cloak I stooped and picked it up

Practically speaking, the disposition of my time had been in no degree influenced by the Count's grotesque requirement I had intended all along to stay at home until eight o'clock, to dine with the Princess X, to go to the dance, and to visit the dearest friend that I had in the world He was a Dominican monk, of great learning and acuteness, resident in the monastery of S Petrox, about half a mile off We were old schoolfellows, and, though our ways of life were very different, he had never lost the ascendancy over me which, as a boy, he had understood how to gain

He was busy reading when I entered his cell, he laid his finger on his lips, to show me that I must not interrupt him

After a long pause, he closed the great volume reverently and asked me what I wanted at that time of night

'I want an immortal soul'

'Curious!' he remarked, pushing his spectacles up on his forehead, 'I have just been studying the question of the soul'

'Well' what is the result of your investigations?'

'My friend,' returned the Dominican, 'what would it avail were I to tell you? I know your mind upon these subjects'

'That is more than I know myself, then—more than I should ever have wished to know but for a strange occurrence'

I told him all the circumstances of my conversation with the Count—not mentioning his name, of course

'You have helped me at many a difficult pass before now,' I said 'Help me again Pour out the contents of that great volume upon my head!'

'You would be as wise as you were before I know you, *amico mio* You own no teacher save experience'

'What is the experience that can make a man believe in that of which he has none? Tell me, that I may seek it'

'Is there any one in the world of whom you are really fond?' said the Dominican

For the fraction of a second I hesitated

'Forgive the question' It is of no importance There is one way by which you can be brought to believe, but it *may* cost you your life Are you willing to risk it?'

'I am bound to preserve my life until to-morrow morning'

'So far I can guarantee it, if you are careful to obey For the rest, you are indifferent? Well and good' Understand that I, on my part, am running a great risk for your sake If what I am about to do were to become known, I should incur excommunication My fellow-churchmen would say that I was endangering a soul within the fold to save one that is without So be it! You are my friend You are, I know, an actor of some experience Do you think that you could personate me?'

'With your instructions, I have no doubt that I could'

He rose, and took from his cupboard a priest's robe and a little cap

'You have just recovered from an illness, you must wear a *beretta* You are close shaven, that is well Under the *beretta* your hair is not too long Be sure to recollect that you are still subject to cold—that you must on no account take it off Before we go any further, oblige me by taking an oath—a solemn oath First, that, whatever may happen, you will attempt no resistance, secondly, that you will never reveal the names of those amongst whom I am going to send you nor any of the circumstances which you may be called

upon to witness Before you swear, reflect ! The possession of a secret of this kind implies considerable danger Is it worth the risk ?'

'A strange question for one of your calling to ask !' I retorted, 'I am no priest, but I think it is'

'Is there anything in the world that you hold sacred ?' said the Dominican

I drew the bit of swansdown from its resting place, profaning the one true sentiment that was in me with a laugh As for my friend, he never even smiled

'That will do !' he said 'Swear upon that !' I did so

'You are now a penitent before me I have heard your confession I am about to absolve you Take accurate note of everything that I say, and reproduce my words, as nearly as you can, when you are called in to the death bed'

'You spoke to me as if I were a woman,' I observed, when he had finished

'You are quite right,' said the monk 'Now let us reverse the parts Do you absolve me, as if I were a woman !'

I repeated the form of words which he had just gone through

'*Evviva !*' he said, when I had done 'You might have been born in a cassock'

At the same moment I heard the hooting of an owl in the garden below He started, and looked at the clock

'Late !' he said 'That is the carriage We have not a moment to lose Let me recommend you to keep silence from the time you leave these doors to the time when you are set down again If you say a word more than is necessary, I will not answer for the consequences I shall await you here on your return Remember your oath' Then, bending forward as if he feared the very walls would hear, he added in a whisper

'*Take no refreshment in that house*'

He touched the back of a volume of the *Via Media*

as he spoke, part of what had appeared to be the book-case sprang open and disclosed a winding stair. Without another word, he pointed down it, taking a light to show me the way. At the last turn of the steps he left me.

I felt the cold breath of the night lifting my hair. Then I was suddenly seized and blindfolded, whether by two or more persons I could not be sure, for I was taken by surprise in the darkness. Determined to adhere to the prescribed conditions of the adventure, I made no sound and I heard a whisper

‘No need to gag him, he has his cue’

In a moment strong arms had lifted me and were carrying me along—over the grass, as I judged, for there was no ring of footsteps. I was let down gently enough upon the seat of a carriage, and away we went like the wind. How long it took, which way we went, whether there was any one else in the carriage, I have no idea. A steady hand must have held the reins. We were going at a breakneck pace, yet we never encountered the smallest obstacle, nor did I even feel a jolt. Thus was I whirled along through the night, as little able to see as if I had been sleeping.

We stopped at last. I was helped out, and guided, as I judged by the mouldy smell, into some cellar or disused passage, at the end of which there were steps. Presumably, they led up into a house, for when we trod on level ground again, the atmosphere was dry and warm, and, to my great surprise, I heard the tones of a piano in the distance, familiar tones at the sound of which my heart beat, though it was a minute before I recollected that I had heard them last as I was leaving the ball room. We went up many stairs, down many more and up again, the sounds growing more and more distinct as we advanced. They ceased abruptly, the bandage was removed, and I found myself standing alone in a tiny room, lit by one small red shaded lamp. I tried the door, but it was locked, mysterious, for I

had heard no turning of the key ' A piano stood open, but there was no music upon it A book lay on the sofa, as if some one had just tossed it down there On the outer side there was no window at all, in the other wall was a recess, formed by three little windows of painted glass, through which a light from below shone dimly, by way of the Madonna and two attendant saints

I waited a long time, but no one came The stillness grew oppressive I threw myself on the sofa, and tried to read, but the air was heated and magnetic—it seemed to thrust itself between me and the lines I looked at the first page of the book to see if there were any indication of the owner, but there was none I then tried several others, all with the same ill success Clearly they had been read with much affection, for they were often marked with a pencil but there was never any name in the beginning, and from one or two of them the fly leaf had been removed

On a sudden the light reflected from below went out, the saints became indistinguishable

My curiosity got the better of me I resolved, come what would, to open one of those windows, to have nothing but a pane of glass between me and the unknown was too strong a temptation I pressed with all my strength against the woodwork of the centre one there was a slight, a very slight, yielding, it seemed to give on darkness I moved the lamp cautiously, so as to concentrate its beams upon the chink, and pressed again For an instant I caught sight of the dark figure of a man, bending over a table, in front of a fireplace, far down below Then the window gave an ominous creak I closed it, and sat breathless Whether the man had heard? I inclined to think that he must have Presently there were footsteps outside

'In half an hour,' said a man's voice

'In half an hour,' said a woman's

It was music echoing a discord The key turned in the lock, the little lady of the swansdown cloak entered,

and shut the door behind her I cannot now conceive my feelings at that moment, but I had just presence of mind enough to recollect that I should be turned out if I did not sustain my part. We saluted each other in the usual way, and she knelt down before me. For the first time it darted through my mind that she was going to make a confession—and to me? A strong repugnance to hear overcame every other consideration. If I could mock that creature, I must be a fiend incarnate. Yet how, with safety to my friend—and to myself—prevent her? I took a step backward. She raised her eyes appealingly. I frowned and turned away.

‘This is some jest,’ I said sternly. ‘I was sent for to attend a deathbed. Take me to the penitent.’

‘It is I that am dying.’

‘Are you mad?’ I demanded. ‘Many a time have I seen death, never with eyes and cheeks like these.’

‘He that has not an hour to live is no nearer death than I am. I shall not see the sun rise to-morrow.’

She spoke with such conviction that I staggered back, reeling under the shock.

‘You are ill,’ she said solicitously, rising from her knees. ‘Holy Virgin, what shall I do? Help! help!’

I summoned all the strength of mind that I possessed.

‘Do not call, my daughter! It is only a passing weakness. The way hither is long. I am but lately recovered from a severe indisposition. Let me rest!’

Some excuse of this kind I think I made. Whatever it was, she accepted it, and stood watching me for a minute or two. Then, seeing that I was better, she said, with great gentleness

‘It was not good to send you out on such a wild night as this. You should have stayed at home and slept. It grieved me so to see that I have made you ill. I did not think of this when I asked my father to send for a priest. I have hardly ever been allowed one, but you are very like some one that I have seen—I cannot feel

as if you were a stranger I could believe anything that you said—I know I could Are you glad to think how greatly it comforts me to see you ?’

‘I would give the remnant of my years, if that could be of any service to you,’ I said, striving not to say it too fervently

She was quiet for a moment,—then, drawing a chair close to the sofa, on which I had fallen back, she resumed

‘I will not weary you with making a long confession I think I can say what is on my mind better like this I trust your face’

She hesitated

‘It is a dreadful thing At first I thought I dared not say it to any one It was wicked of me even to think it’

She hid her face

‘But you, you are older, you may not have very long to live either Things look so different then If you said it, I could believe it I know I could’

Once more she hesitated The wind had risen again in all its fury, and was howling outside the window

‘Satan tempts us,’ she said

‘Yes,’ I said ‘Satan tempts us’

She turned her face away, clasped her hands tightly, and went on

‘I do not know how to say it It was like this I was at a dance, and very happy I think I never was so happy in my life I never danced with any one before There came a moth, and it was going to burn itself He saved it, and then he said, “What matter if it had died, for we were all like moths” There is nothing more’

‘He told a lie’

‘I knew it, I knew it,’ she said ‘Say that! Look at me as you say it! Say “I believe we live again”’

‘I believe that we live again,’ I said solemnly, answering her gaze with perfect truthfulness The anguish



passed away, the strained hands loosened. She bent her head and closed her eyes. When she spoke again, she said in a whisper 'It is all well. How good of you to come!' He said he would believe it, if I told him. I could not tell him. He made me feel as if I did not know. If I could only—will you say this to him for me? Ah, no! I forgot. You must never tell any one.'

'You shall tell him yourself.'

A light, first of wonder, then of the happiness of those who see a vision, dawned in her eyes. I was still half in heaven with her, when the Count entered. She told him that I had been ill—that I ought not to have come out at night.

'I am greatly obliged to you for your kindness.' The Count addressed himself to me with a graceful, though condescending bow. 'The Abbot is informed of the reasons for which secrecy is imperative,' he continued. 'I feel sure that you will hold me excused. But we must not suffer you to go hence without a draught of wine.' His daughter went before him.

I followed, down the dark staircase into a hall—the same evidently as that into which I had peeped from the window of the boudoir. It lay in darkness now, even the fire burned low. The Count carried a lamp.

Strange figures, stranger faces, met my eyes. Goat-footed creatures were driving airy chariots over my head, Cupids and Fauns and things half man, half beast or bird, were at their wildest revelry around me. Here stood *l'homme armé*, his visor up, nothing but vacant blackness behind it. There, two colossal heads, man and woman, leered at each other. Garlands of carved fruit and flowers, amidst which squirrels, monkeys, and little owls were playing, wreathed pillar and post of the staircase by which we had come down. No two were alike.

In front of the fire stood a table, on it a tray of polished brass, holding a flask of fine Venetian work and some glasses.

## THE FRIENDLY FOE

He seated himself in silence I did the same  
A French clock on its bracket struck, or rather tolled,  
an hour after midnight

Lifting his dark eyes, the Count fixed them steadily  
upon me

I feared his recognition too much to meet them, for he  
and I had looked each other in the eyes once before It  
is impossible to mask the soul when she is sitting at her  
open windows But he had no suspicion

'In the course of your life,' he said, 'you have, no  
doubt, seen many strange things' He waved his hand  
in the direction of the grotesques 'Did you ever, if  
I may ask the question, see a house furnished in this  
way before?'

'Never'

'Could it have been so furnished by any reasonable  
man?'

'A poet?' I said tentatively

The Count shrugged his shoulders

'There are no poets in the family'

I kept silence

'The man shot himself His son built the little room  
up above It has no window to the front There his  
wife lived until her death'

He glanced up at a portrait on the wall, the features  
of which strongly resembled his own

'No one knows what became of him'

As he spoke, he pulled a silk tassel which hung by a  
long slender cord from the ceiling A thousand lights  
flashed out The heart of every carven rose became a  
heart of flame, stars glowed among the vine and pome  
granate, eyes of fire shone from the grotesque heads  
The lights, the faces, the flowers and fruit all round  
wreathed themselves into the first letter of the name of  
my enemy Everywhere it was written A wave of  
fresh, vigorous hate surged over me

'Have you ever seen an apartment lighted in this  
manner before?' he asked

‘I must confess that it appears to me fantastic, though very beautiful’

‘We were not speaking of the effect, I think It is unusual?’

‘Certainly’

‘The invention is due to the father of the present owner He fell by his own hand’

‘And the present owner?’ I said,

The Count’s expression changed He looked at his daughter, who had seated herself on a low couch by the fire She did not appear to be listening, but he lowered his voice

‘The present owner has one child—now in the flower of her youth She does not know the dreadful fate of her ancestors She has only been told thus much—that at the age of seventeen she will pass into another life She feels no fear, since she is going to the mother whom, as a babe, she lost Of the exact moment and manner of her death she has been kept in ignorance until within an hour of it Nothing has frightened, nothing has distressed her Pure and unspotted as she came to him, he that best loves her desires to send her back to that heaven which is more real to her than earth, to that heaven which will save her from knowing—as, but for him, she must infallibly know—that this earth is a hell Is he right?’

‘No,’ I said, with a certain assurance ‘He is mad’ The Count started, but on the instant he was calm again

‘That makes the fifth generation,’ he said, as if to himself ‘In the eyes of ignorant persons he may be mad perhaps Is it not the truest sanity to prevent these horrors from culminating in a sixth? I cannot but approve his judgement’

He turned towards the girl She raised her face to his I saw that it was white as marble I thought that she was going to faint Instinctively I seized the flask and poured out some of the wine

'Well thought of!' said the Count 'The Church, however, comes first—even before a lady'

He made a sign to her

'You need refreshment more than I,' she said, offering me the glass

I took it from her, not thinking what I did And yet some word of hers recalled a word spoken before

'Refreshment!'

*Take no refreshment in that house*

I had but tasted For the moment my senses still were clear I saw the Count sprinkle drops from a phial on to his handkerchief and give it to the little lady I saw her fall back softly on the couch

Her father watched with rapt attention The swans-down cloak that she had worn was hanging over the back of a chair Suddenly he tore a bit of it away and held it to her lips The light down never stirred

I thought that I called out, but heard no sound There was a weight of lead upon my eyes—the air was thick with fog I fought with might and main to get to her I could not stir a step I could not even see her now

Making one last effort to move, I missed my footing and fell—fell, as it seemed, into a yawning gulf that opened suddenly before me—fell down and down and down into the fathomless depths of that slumber wherein we spend the half of existence

But Lethe had been meted out unevenly, to her the sleep that knew no earthly morrow—to me the sleep that ended in a few hours, leaving the rest of life a dream

On the day after, I met the Count at eight o'clock in the morning At eight o'clock in the evening I kept my dinner engagement

WILLIAM SYDNEY PORTER  
(O HENRY)

(1867-1910)

THE COP AND THE ANTHEM

[From *The Four Million* 1906]

ON his bench in Madison Square Soapy moved uneasily When wild goose honk high of nights, and when women without sealskin coats grow kind to their husbands, and when Soapy moves uneasily on his bench in the park, you may know that winter is near at hand

A dead leaf fell in Soapy's lap That was Jack Frost's card Jack is kind to the regular denizens of Madison Square, and gives fair warning of his annual call At the corners of four streets he hands his pasteboard to the North Wind, footman of the mansion of All Outdoors, so that the inhabitants thereof may make ready

Soapy's mind became cognizant of the fact that the time had come for him to resolve himself into a singular Committee of Ways and Means to provide against the coming rigour And therefore he moved uneasily on his bench

The hibernatorial ambitions of Soapy were not of the highest In them were no considerations of Mediterranean cruises, of soporific Southern skies or drifting in the Vesuvian Bay Three months on the Island was what his soul craved Three months of assured board and bed and congenial company, safe from Boreas and bluecoats, seemed to Soapy the essence of things desirable

For years the hospitable Blackwell's had been his winter quarters Just as his more fortunate fellow New Yorkers had bought their tickets to Palm Beach and

the Riviera each winter, so Soapy had made his humble arrangements for his annual hegira to the Island. And now the time was come. On the previous night three Sabbath newspapers, distributed beneath his coat, about his ankles and over his lap, had failed to repulse the cold as he slept on his bench near the spurting fountain in the ancient square. So the Island loomed large and timely in Soapy's mind. He scorned the provisions made in the name of charity for the city's dependents. In Soapy's opinion the Law was more benign than Philanthropy. There was an endless round of institutions, municipal and eleemosynary, on which he might set out and receive lodging and food accordant with the simple life. But to one of Soapy's proud spirit the gifts of charity are encumbered. If not in coin you must pay in humiliation of spirit for every benefit received at the hands of philanthropy. As Cæsar had his Brutus, every bed of charity must have its toll of a bath, every loaf of bread its compensation of a private and personal inquisition. Wherefore it is better to be a guest of the law, which, though conducted by rules, does not meddle unduly with a gentleman's private affairs.

Soapy, having decided to go to the Island, at once set about accomplishing his desire. There were many easy ways of doing this. The pleasantest was to dine luxuriously at some expensive restaurant, and then, after declaring insolvency, be handed over quietly and without uproar to a policeman. An accommodating magistrate would do the rest.

Soapy left his bench and strolled out of the square and across the level sea of asphalt, where Broadway and Fifth Avenue flow together. Up Broadway he turned, and halted at a glittering cafe, where are gathered together nightly the choicest products of the grape, the silkworm and the protoplasm.

Soapy had confidence in himself from the lowest button of his vest upward. He was shaven, and his

coat was decent and his neat black, ready tied four in-hand had been presented to him by a lady missionary on Thanksgiving Day. If he could reach a table in the restaurant unsuspected success would be his. The portion of him that would show above the table would raise no doubt in the waiter's mind. A roasted mallard duck, thought Soapy, would be about the thing—with a bottle of Chablis, and then Camembert, a demi tasse and a cigar. One dollar for the cigar would be enough. The total would not be so high as to call forth any supreme manifestation of revenge from the cafe management, and yet the meat would leave him filled and happy for the journey to his winter refuge.

But as Soapy set foot inside the restaurant door the head waiter's eye fell upon his frayed trousers and decadent shoes. Strong and ready hands turned him about and conveyed him in silence and haste to the sidewalk and averted the ignoble fate of the menaced mallard.

Soapy turned off Broadway. It seemed that his route to the coveted island was not to be an epicurean one. Some other way of entering limbo must be thought of.

At a corner of Sixth Avenue electric lights and cunningly displayed wares behind plate-glass made a shop window conspicuous. Soapy took a cobblestone and dashed it through the glass. People came running round the corner, a policeman in the lead. Soapy stood still, with his hands in his pockets, and smiled at the sight of brass buttons.

'Where's the man that done that?' inquired the officer excitedly.

'Don't you figure out that I might have had something to do with it?' said Soapy, not without sarcasm, but friendly, as one greets good fortune.

The policeman's mind refused to accept Soapy even as a clue. Men who smash windows do not remain to parley with the law's minions. They take to their heels.

The policeman saw a man half way down the block running to catch a car With drawn club he joined in the pursuit Soapy, with disgust in his heart, loafed along, twice unsuccessful

On the opposite side of the street was a restaurant of no great pretensions It catered to large appetites and modest purses Its crockery and atmosphere were thick, its soup and napery thin Into this place Soapy took his accusive shoes and tell tale trousers without challenge At a table he sat and consumed beefsteak, flapjacks, doughnuts, and pie And then to the waiter he betrayed the fact that the minutest coin and himself were strangers

'Now, get busy and call a cop,' said Soapy 'And don't keep a gentleman waiting'

'No cop for youse,' said the waiter, with a voice like butter cakes and an eye like the cherry in a Manhattan cocktail 'Hey, Con!'

Neatly upon his left ear on the callous pavement two waiters pitched Soapy He arose, joint by joint, as a carpenter's rule opens, and beat the dust from his clothes Arrest seemed but a rosy dream The Island seemed very far away A policeman who stood before a drug store two doors away laughed and walked down the street

Five blocks Soapy travelled before his courage permitted him to woo capture again This time the opportunity presented what he fatuously termed to himself a 'cinch' A young woman of a modest and pleasing guise was standing before a show window gazing with sprightly interest at its display of shaving mugs and inkstands, and two yards from the window a large policeman of severe demeanour leaned against a water-plug

It was Soapy's design to assume the role of the despicable and execrated 'masher' The refined and elegant appearance of his victim and the contiguity of the conscientious cop encouraged him to believe that



he would soon feel the pleasant official clutch upon his arm that would ensure his winter quarters on the right little, tight little isle

Soapy straightened the lady missionary's ready-made tie, dragged his shrinking cuffs into the open, set his hat at a killing cant and sidled toward the young woman. He made eyes at her, was taken with sudden coughs and 'hems', smiled, smirked, and went brazenly through the impudent and contemptible litany of the 'masher'. With half an eye Soapy saw that the policeman was watching him fixedly. The young woman moved away a few steps, and again bestowed her absorbed attention upon the shaving mugs. Soapy followed, boldly stepping to her side, raised his hat and said

'Ah there, Bedelia! 'Don't you want to come and play in my yard?'

The policeman was still looking. The persecuted young woman had but to beckon a finger and Soapy would be practically *en route* for his insular haven. Already he imagined he could feel the cosy warmth of the station-house. The young woman faced him and, stretching out a hand, caught Soapy's coat sleeve.

'Sure, Mike,' she said joyfully, 'if you'll blow me to a pail of suds. I'd have spoke to you sooner, but the cop was watching.'

With the young woman playing the clinging ivy to his oak Soapy walked past the policeman overcome with gloom. He seemed doomed to liberty.

At the next corner he shook off his companion and ran. He halted in the district where by night are found the lightest streets, hearts, vows, and librettos. Women in furs and men in greatcoats moved gaily in the wintry air. A sudden fear seized Soapy that some dreadful enchantment had rendered him immune to arrest. The thought brought a little of panic upon it, and when he came upon another policeman lounging grandly in front of a transplendent theatre he caught at the immediate straw of 'disorderly conduct'.

On the sidewalk Soapy began to yell drunken gibberish at the top of his harsh voice. He danced, howled, raved, and otherwise disturbed the welkin.

The policeman twirled his club, turned his back to Soapy, and remarked to a citizen:

'Tis one of them Yale lads celebratin' the goose egg they give to the Hartford College. Noisy, but no harm. We've instructions to lave them be.'

Disconsolate, Soapy ceased his unavailing racket. Would never a policeman lay hands on him? In his fancy the Island seemed an unattainable Arcadia. He buttoned his thin coat against the chilling wind.

In a cigar store he saw a well dressed man lighting a cigar at a swinging light. His silk umbrella he had set by the door on entering. Soapy stepped inside, secured the umbrella and sauntered off with it slowly. The man at the cigar light followed hastily.

'My umbrella,' he said sternly.

'Oh, is it?' sneered Soapy, adding insult to petit larceny. 'Well, why don't you call a policeman?' I took it. Your umbrella! Why don't you call a cop? There stands one on the corner.'

The umbrella owner slowed his steps. Soapy did likewise, with a presentiment that luck would again run against him. The policeman looked at the two curiously.

'Of course,' said the umbrella man—'that is—well, you know how these mistakes occur—I—if it's your umbrella I hope you'll excuse me—I picked it up this morning in a restaurant—If you recognize it as yours, why—I hope you'll—'

'Of course it's mine,' said Soapy, viciously.

The ex umbrella man retreated. The policeman hurried to assist a tall blonde in an opera cloak across the street in front of a street car that was approaching two blocks away.

Soapy walked eastward through a street damaged by improvements. He hurled the umbrella wrathfully.

into an excavation. He muttered against the men who wear helmets and carry clubs. Because he wanted to fall into their clutches, they seemed to regard him as a king who could do no wrong.

At length Soapy reached one of the avenues to the east where the glitter and turmoil was but faint. He set his face down this towards Madison Square, for the homing instinct survives even when the home is a park bench.

But on an unusually quiet corner Soapy came to a standstill. Here was an old church, quaint and rambling and gabled. Through one violet stained window a soft light glowed, where, no doubt, the organist loitered over the keys, making sure of his mastery of the coming Sabbath anthem. For there drifted out to Soapy's ears sweet music that caught and held him transfixed against the convolutions of the iron fence.

The moon was above, lustrous and serene, vehicles and pedestrians were few, sparrows twittered sleepily in the eaves—for a little while the scene might have been a country churchyard. And the anthem that the organist played cemented Soapy to the iron fence, for he had known it well in the days when his life contained such things as mothers and roses and ambitions and friends and immaculate thoughts and collars.

The conjunction of Soapy's receptive state of mind and the influences about the old church wrought a sudden and wonderful change in his soul. He viewed with swift horror the pit into which he had tumbled, the degraded days, unworthy desires, dead hopes, wrecked faculties, and base motives that made up his existence.

And also in a moment his heart responded thrillingly to this novel mood. An instantaneous and strong impulse moved him to battle with his desperate fate. He would pull himself out of the mire, he would make a man of himself again, he would conquer the evil that had taken possession of him. There was time, he was

comparatively young yet, he would resurrect his old eager ambitions and pursue them without faltering. Those solemn but sweet organ notes had set up a revolution in him. To-morrow he would go into the roaring down-town district and find work. A fur importer had once offered him a place as driver. He would find him to-morrow and ask for the position. He would be somebody in the world. He would—

Soapy felt a hand laid on his arm. He looked quickly around into the broad face of a policeman.

'What are you doin' here?' asked the officer.

'Nothin',' said Soapy.

'Then come along,' said the policeman.

'Three months on the Island,' said the Magistrate in the Police Court the next morning.

# R MURRAY GILCHRIST

(1867-1917)

[From *A Peakland Faggot* 1897]

## THE END OF THE WORLD

It was the first night of the Wakes, and the carrier's big cart was crowded with folk who came from the neighbouring country to visit their relations and friends. The greasy lamps that diffused a rank, fishy smell threw quivering lights on fantastic bonnets, that ranged in style from the antiquated scuttle with its fall of black net embroidered with chenille of the rich old farmer's wife, to the saucy tangle of scarlet poppies that crowned the auburn plaits of the innkeeper's daughter.

In the right hand corner, farthest from the door, sat a withered spinster, dressed in a crape gown and a loose berth of knitted silk which her mother had worn forty years ago. Her peaked face was very wan, and her eyes sparkled in the semi darkness like live coals.

The woman who sat nearest to her noted her suppressed excitement, and offered her a draught from a jack-bottle of gin.

'Tek a pull, Miss Bland,' she said. 'Trouble's ower-coomin' yo'. I reckon yo'r brother's end's bin a sad trial.'

The spinster waved her uncouthly gloved hand. 'Hoosh!' she whispered, faintly, 'they're talkin' abaft a roary boary ails daan theer!'

The wearer of the scuttle was describing a meteor which she had seen in the night.

'Well, I'd just wakened an' turned raand i' bed when a leet 'gan to shine ower th' moor—exactly as ef th' day were breekin'. But I felt as I hedna bin abed long, so I ups an' looks at mester's watch, an' et were on'y five minutes past twelve. "O Lord," says I, "th'

heather mun be afire an' th' corn's ready for cuttin'." Peter he hears me an' slips fro' th' bed an' draws up th' blind, an' when we looks aat, we sees all th' north sky blazin' wi' colours like a rainbow. Et were i' th' form o' a crown at first, then et gathered westwards an' changed to summat like a sword. Theer werena hawf-an-hour ere et died, but nayther me nor mester slept a wink after. I've heard as et's a sign o' fair weather."

The girl with the poppies chimed in with 'Fayther said as fowk proffersied th' end o' th' world fro' et!'

A low moan crept from the spinster's lips. She had slept heavily at the house in the distant town where her brother had died, and this was the first she had heard of the apparition. She pressed her thin hands against the back of the seat and attempted to rise, but fell back awkwardly.

'I canna tell 'em,' she muttered 'Et'd breek their hearts Best for et to coom like a thief i' th' neet'

The facetious man who sat in the opposite corner overheard her last words

' Bless me, mam, hes somebody stole yo'r purse ? ' he said ' Yo' do look bad '

She strove to regain her self possession

'No,' she replied, with a sickly smile 'Et's on'y as I'm more nor a bit tired I'll be all reet i' a day or two—ay, me, what am I sayin', when th' world's—I mean when I'm a' whoam'

'I s'pose yo'r feelin' duller 'cause o' bein' away fro' yo'r young chap,' he remarked, giggling foolishly 'I b'lieve as yo've never bin parted for so long sin' he began coortin' yo', thirty five year sin' '

To their credit, the other travellers ignored his attempt to excite their mirth. The story of her courtship belonged to the older generation, and although in her early days folk had spoken jestingly of the lovers who could never make up their minds to wed, time had accustomed them to look compassionately upon the affair. The sole hundrances had been two old mothers

who had declared that their homesshould never be broken up But they had died fifteen years ago, and the courtship had continued until both were grey and wrinkled

The cart lumbered on and on—along the rough heath road that undulated like the waves of a stormy sea—down the steep hill and across the ford of the Derwent, where the waters, swollen with a flood in the uplands, touched the horses' bellies and wet the straw near the door Then through the long stretch of woodland, and up the Lydgate lane to the village

Afront the 'Bold Rodney' the passengers alighted A round-shouldered gaffer with a bright, kindly face helped the spinster down the steps and swung her cow-hair trunk over his back

'Yo're lookin' faint, Sarah,' he said, 'an' I dunna wonder Et'ld try yo' sorely bein' wi' him at th' last By jowks, I hev bin lonesome wi'at yo'—et seems a year o' Sundays sin' yo' went away Yo'll soon be reet, tho' I stepped across to th' house after tea, an' I dusted all an' leeted th' fire an' set th' kettle on, an' then took th' cat an' laid her i' th' chair Yo'll be ready for yo'r supper?'

She caught his arm, for her knees were giving way

'I canna eat owt—I shanna want onything else to eat or drink,' she groaned '*O Dave, th' end o' th' world's coom'n' to neet!*'

He gave such a start that the strap of the trunk loosened and it fell heavily to the ground The intensity of her manner and his knowledge of her truthfulness brought instant conviction

'An' all them 'ams i' pickle, an' th' owd mare due to foal to morrow' he lamented

'Dunna bother abaat such things,' she whimpered 'Theer's weightier matters i' hond Coom indoors, an' I'll tell yo' all abaat et Et's no use frightin' other fowk, we mun beer et oursens'

He followed to the house place and set the trunk on the dresser, and stood tremblingly waiting for her to

disburden herself of the fatal news She untied the strings of her bonnet, and unfastened the glossy buttons of the berth

'Et were th' neet after Jake's buryin', she began, hurriedly 'I'd gone to th' market-place for a change, for th' house were that stifin', an' I wanted to be whoam again, but Jane said I mun stop another day An' theer were a man preachin' on th' steps o' th' cross—an aged, venerable man like th' picture o' Is yah i' th' Bible'

She paused for breath 'An' what did he tell yo'?' Dave stammered

'He said as he'd med it up aat o' th' proffercies i' th' Owd Testament an' th' Revelations i' th' New as th' world were doomed But we were to hev a sign gi'en—a breet leet i' th' sky at midnight—a leet sim'lar to th' roary-boary aalis as cem last neet, an' twenty four hours after that everything 'ld hap as he foretold Th' dead'll rise Eh dear' eh dear'

She began to sob violently, Dave put his arm around her waist

'Wench,' he said, with much fervour, 'dunna fret Yo've done nowt to be 'shamed o', an' no more hev I, an' ef we mun die, well, we mun Hark to th' kettle boilin', theer's buttered cake i' th' oven Surely theer's no call for us to go wi' empty bellies An' for th' Lord's sake dunna let's mention what's coomin' till we've doon eatin'

So they partook of a comfortable meal, and when it was finished, Sarah washed the cups and dishes and replaced them on the rack

'We've on'y got two more hours to live, Dave,' she said, quietly 'If I could hev hed my way, I'd hev chosen soom other time Th' "owd man apples" is finer nor they've bin sin' mother died, an' theer's that bacon o' yo'rs wi' none to eat et'

'Never bother,' he said, despondently 'Et'll be all th' same soon Let us sit an' wait hond i'-hond'



They drew nearer the hearth and rested silently until the tall clock struck eleven. Then Sarah rose and moved her chair to the wall.

'Lad,' she said, 's'pose we go daan to th' church-yard an' wait theer. Yo'r fowk an' mine are buried alongside, an' et'ld seem more respectful ef we were theer when they cem up. I'll tek a shawl to put under us.'

He agreed at once, and they went stealthily down the dark street and over the stile to the south side of the church. There they sat on the grass beside a square tombstone that was embellished with designs of cherubim, and death's heads, and hour-glasses. As time passed Sarah's head sank to her lover's shoulder. She was worn out with excitement and fatigue. In a few minutes she fell asleep.

Twelve chimed from the tower and Dave was filled with supreme terror. But no thunderclap came, nor did the graves show any signs of subterranean disturbance. He also began to grow drowsy and he leaned back against the stone, his face touching hers.

Dawn broke, a glorious red dawn, and soon the sunlight touched their eyelids. They awoke simultaneously, and after a moment of amazement, Sarah drew herself away, blushing like a young girl.

'That fellow were a liar an' a brute,' she cried, angrily, 'gettin' two decent fowk to stop aat o' doors all neet. Whatever'll Milton say ef et gets abaat? We mun steal whoam afore onybody's stirrin'.'

When they entered her garden, they heard the whistling of an approaching ploughboy. Sarah tried to run along the narrow path, but stumbled over a projecting currant bough, and Dave was obliged to carry her indoors.

'Ef we've bin seen aar character's gone,' she wailed, 'Milton were e'er th' evilest thinkin' spot i' th' Peak.'

But her lover only laughed. 'I fear theer's nowt for us but to get wed at onct,' he said. 'Yo' want someone

to look after yo' I'll go an' tell parson abaat th' spurrin's this morn An' now I mun go an' see how th' mare's gettin' on'

### THE LAST POSSET

THE Yeld is a small, stuccoed farmstead, lying in a concave on the south slope of Milton Edge Three or four fields surround the buildings, beyond, in every direction, runs the moor with its marshes and rocks and tumuli A few spruce firs shelter the house from the east wind the storms of two centuries have made them lop-sided and bent the trunks bow-shape, so that such as are nearest rest their tops on the lichened slates

Miss Bimble was toiling up the sandy path, with a basket of provisions bought in the village of Milton, which lies out of sight beyond the curve of the valley There was a look of virtuous resolution on her puckered face, an uncommon kindness that for the nonce made her almost comely At the stile, where the path entered the first field, she put down her burden, 'phewed', and mopped her forehead with her apron

'By'r leddy,' she muttered, 'et's more nor hot—et's griddlin' I reckon I suffer more wi' bein' fat When that poor lad Aitchilees were a courtin' me, we used for to think nowt o' th' climb—et were but child's play then But I measured nineteen inch raand th' waist i' those days, an' naa I'm forty an' five inch' Solid flesh, tho', she struck her bosom heavily with her closed hand, 'better nor's to be fun' naa' days!'

A cur dog came limping towards her from the house She recognized it as belonging to her nearest neighbour, an old farmer who lived two miles farther along the Edge When she reached the gate of the cobbled yard, where the stable and house front and 'shippon' formed three sides of a court, in whose midst steamed a lush, dock-grown manure heap that was surrounded by a

brown moat, she saw her visitor sitting on the pig block beside the door

'Good e'en to yo', Hannah,' he said

'Good e'en, James God's mercy, haa I hev sweated !'

'Ay, et's close Theer's thun'er abaat An' yo've been weightied, too I thowt I'd coom ower wi' a bit o' news for yo' I went ower th' hill to Thornhill this morn, to see haa Aitchilees Chapman were gettin' on'

She unlocked the door 'Coom in an' hev a sup o' beer,' she said 'I tapped et yesternoon—et's th' March brewin' Well, an' haa's he doin' ?'

'I'm sorry to say as he's dead—he died just afore I got to th' spot'

'Eh dear ! eh dear ! an' he were such a fine fellow, he were An' on'y fifty Whate'er mun his wife an' childer do ? Hoo's no push abaat her, an' th' eldest gal esna owd enow to go to sarvice !'

'Th' woman as were nursin' him said as he'd begged an' prayed as they shouldna be sent to th' Bastille Th' wife's abed wi' another babby—th' tenth, an' hoo couldna be wi' him at th' last Theer's talk already o' gettin' up a 'scription an' fixin' em up i' a shop'

'I'll tell yo' what, James, ef they do I shanna be again gi'in' summat I've thowt o' helpin' 'em all day Yo' know fowk said once upon a time as he were after me ?'

'Oo, ay, I hevna forgot Yo' jilted th' poor chap, yo' did'

She bridled foolishly and ran on tiptoe (to show that she was still agile) to the pantry, where she drew a pot of ale

'I wunna tell yo' what I'll gie,' she said 'I might surprise yo'. Theer'll be little need o' other 'scriptions when they get mine Sup savagely, man, theer's plenty more'

He drained the mug and laid it heavily on the table

'No more, thank yo', Hannah Et's good, thatten—

none o' malt coom an peep at-th'-wayter stuff Naa I mun really go, milkin's near, an' my owd lass 'll be gettin' oneasy'

When he had started, she called her own kine, with a shrill, oily 'Leddy, coom, up, coom up, leday,' and milked and set everything in order for the night. After she had returned to the house-place, she went to an oaken cabinet, that stood between the hearth and the window. It was a fine piece of furniture, carved with scenes from Holy Writ. Here Daniel scowled at man faced lions, there Balaam mercilessly flogged his ass.

She unlocked one of the topmost doors and took from the shelf an uncouth pitcher of shiny green ware, covered with monstrous figures in high relief. As dusk was falling, she lighted a candle, so that she might watch the glittering of the bulging sides.

'I dunna like to part wi' et, but et seems my duty,' she said, sadly 'Et's bin i' aar fam'ly for hunnerds o' years. Feyther always hed et as a sailor brought et fro' Chaney.'

She passed her hand over the rotund belly.

'Mony's th' carouse yo've helped ' ' she murmured, in fond apostrophe 'Mony's the Bumble as hes gone to bed wi' een small as grey peas after suppin' fro' thee. But thaa mun go to save Aitchilees' bairns. I'm fain to part wi' thee, but no paar upon earth 'ld mek' me touch th' money as I saved as es i' th' bank.'

The dragons' eyes winked seducingly, tempting her to a last posset.

'We'll part i' mirth. Good owd frien's hev we bin, an' to morrow I mun tek thee daan to Squire Bagshawe's, an' mind him as he offered ten good pun' for thee when he set him daan for a drink last Twelfth. I little thowt that I'd ever find i' my heart to part wi' thee, but thaa mun know I were fond o' Aitchilees, tho' I did gi'e him th' mitten. I were sure as he were after th' land, an' I'd heerd as he 'd walked more nor once wi'

th' wench he wed for th' first wife      He might hev  
her for me    hoo were fow as neet ' '

She put the jug on the oven top to heat, and went  
again to the pantry, to draw another pint of ale

' Feyther said as thaa wert to pass to my eldest lad,'  
she said, as she returned, ' an' as I hevna ony childer,  
an' surely ne'er will have ony naa, et 's as well thaa'rt  
goin'    Cousin Richard Henry 's my heir, an' I wouldna  
hev his slut o' a wife chippin' bits aat o' thee, an' belike  
g'een thee to th' childer for a plaything    Nay, thaa'dst  
best go an' set up Aitchilees' young uns for life '

The door of the cabinet still hung open, showing a  
row of stone-ware pint bottles

' Et shall be a posset—a Kirsmas posset i' harvest  
time    Little else but posset hes been drunk aat o' thee  
i' my livin' mem'ry    An' et mun be th' strongest posset  
as thaa'st held i' thy belly for mony a long year    Gin i'  
et, an' rum, an' whiskey, an' nutmegs, an' cloves an'  
ginger    I wunna hev no milk—a gill o' cream wi' lump  
sugar 's th' best    An' a raand o' toast to soften et '

She took a little brass saucepan from the rack and  
poured in the ale and set it over the clear heart ef the  
fire    One by one she dropped in the spices, and when  
the contents had begun to simmer, she moved the pan  
to the hob and cut a slice of bread    This she toasted  
until it was of uniform straw colour, then she broke  
it into the posset jug and soaked it with cream    The  
ale sent a pungent aroma through the room

' Et 's abaat ready,' she said, sniffing ' Naa I mun  
pour et in    By th' godlings, et smells gran' '    I'll do  
thee honour, owd jug, et 's the last posset as e'er I'll  
sup fro' thee, an' I'll mek et real powerful '

She filled a tea cup with neat rum and added it to  
the rest, stirring carefully meanwhile    When she be-  
lieved it to be thoroughly mixed, she used the same  
quantities of whisky and gin    The fragrance actually  
brought tears to her eyes

' J amna sure as I hevna put too much sperrit to et,

but I do consider et's a success Here's to thy good health i' th' fine place thaa'rt goin' to Thaa'lt stan' i' a press full o' Crown Derby—better comp ny thaa'st ne'er known'

She drank and smacked her lips 'I've fun' aat haa to mek posset naa, I do b'lieve,' she exclaimed, gleefully 'I ne'er supped such i' my life afore'

Then she drew the table nearer the settle and snuggled in the warmest corner 'I'll think abaat Aitchilees as I drink Happen he'll know as he's i' my mind, an' as I'm tendin' to do well for them as he's left behind Like as not my help'll set the childer all on their feet They may coom to be well to do fowk, an' all aat o' my posset jug'

The blood, chilled for so many years, grew warm and vigorous as she sipped and sipped The coarse brush of her fancy painted bright pictures of the past—vignettes akin to those one sees on the porcelain faces of old Derbyshire 'long sleeved clocks' She saw herself leaning on his arm as they strolled through meadows aglow with daffy down dilhes and primroses, she saw him waiting for her at the 'leppings' of the Milton Brook Then they were kneeling together in one of the square pews of the church, praying from one book It seemed to her as if she heard his voice, soft and wheedling as ever

'Aitchilees, lad, I looved yo', I did,' she whispered

It was near bedtime now she took up the jug and drank what was left with one long gulp

'I'm afeard et's gotten i' my yead,' she sighed, faintly 'I'm sick like—I do b'lieve I've tekken a drop too much'

She stretched herself full length on the lang settle, and fell asleep and dreamed that she was turned out of the house for debts that she knew nothing about When she awoke, candle and fire were out and the room was in utter darkness She felt as if she cared not whether she lived or died, but her depression was not caused by

her lover's death Rain was beating loudly against the windows , a rumble of thunder shook the air

She rose, and with the sudden motion, upset the three-legged table The posset jug fell to the hearth and broke into fragments

' Drat th' thing, an' drat et an' drat et ' ' she snarled  
' Aitchilees' brats 'll hev nowt fro' me naa ' '

And she stumbled blindly to the door

# HECTOR H MUNRO

(SAKI)

(1870-1916)

## THE STRATEGIST

[From *Reginald in Russia* 1910]

Mrs JALLATT's young people's parties were severely exclusive, it came cheaper that way, because you could ask fewer to them. Mrs Jallatt didn't study cheapness, but somehow she generally attained it.

'There'll be about ten girls,' speculated Rollo, as he drove to the function, 'and I suppose four fellows, unless the Wrotsleys bring their cousin, which Heaven forbid. That would mean Jack and me against three of them.'

Rollo and the Wrotsley brethren had maintained an undying feud almost from nursery days. They only met now and then in the holidays, and the meeting was usually tragic for whichever happened to have the fewest backers on hand. Rollo was counting to-night on the presence of a devoted and muscular partisan to hold an even balance. As he arrived he heard his prospective champion's sister apologizing to the hostess for the unavoidable absence of her brother, a moment later he noted that the Wrotsleys *had* brought their cousin.

Two against three would have been exciting and possibly unpleasant, one against three promised to be about as amusing as a visit to a dentist. Rollo ordered his carriage for as early as was decently possible, and faced the company with a smile that he imagined the better sort of aristocrat would have worn when mounting to the guillotine.

'So glad you were able to come,' said the elder Wrotsley heartily.

'Now, you children will like to play games, I sup



pose,' said Mrs Jallatt, by way of giving things a start, and as they were too well bred to contradict her there only remained the question of what they were to play at

'I know of a good game,' said the elder Wrotsley innocently 'The fellows leave the room and think of a word, then they come back again, and the guls have to find out what the word is'

Rollo knew that game He would have suggested it himself if his faction had been in the majority

'It doesn't promise to be very exciting,' sniffed the superior Dolores Sneep as the boys filed out of the room Rollo thought differently He trusted to Providence that Wrotsley had nothing worse than knotted handkerchiefs at his disposal

The word choosers locked themselves in the library to ensure that their deliberations should not be interrupted Providence turned out to be not even decently neutral, on a rack on the library wall were a dog whip and a whalebone riding switch Rollo thought it criminal negligence to leave such weapons of precision lying about He was given a choice of evils, and chose the dog-whip, the next minute or so he spent in wondering how he could have made such a stupid selection Then they went back to the languidly expectant females

'The word's "camel",' announced the Wrotsley cousin blunderingly

'You stupid!' screamed the girls, 'we've got to *guess* the word Now you'll have to go back and think of another'

'Not for worlds,' said Rollo, 'I mean, the word isn't really camel, we were rotting Pretend it's dromedary' he whispered to the others

'I heard them say "dromedary"' I heard them I don't care what you say, I heard them,' squealed the odious Dolores 'With ears as long as hers one would hear anything,' thought Rollo savagely

'We shall have to go back, I suppose,' said the elder Wrotsley resignedly

The conclave locked itself once more into the library 'Look here, I'm not going through that dog whip business again,' protested Rollo

'Certainly not, dear,' said the elder Wiotsley, 'we'll try the whalebone switch this time, and then you'll know which hurts most. It's only by personal experience that one finds out these things.'

It was swiftly borne in upon Rollo that his earlier selection of the dog whip had been a really sound one. The conclave gave his under lip time to steady itself while it debated the choice of the necessary word. 'Mustang' was no good, as half the girls wouldn't know what it meant, finally 'quagga' was pitched on.

'You must come and sit down over here,' chorused the investigating committee on their return, but Rollo was obdurate in insisting that the questioned person always stood up. On the whole, it was a relief when the game was ended and supper was announced.

Mrs Jallatt did not stint her young guests, but the more expensive delicacies of her supper-table were never unnecessarily duplicated, and it was usually good policy to take what you wanted while it was still there. On this occasion she had provided sixteen peaches to 'go round' among fourteen children, it was really not her fault that the two Wiotsleys and their cousin, foreseeing the long foodless drive home, had each quietly pocketed an extra peach, but it was distinctly trying for Dolores and the fat and good natured Agnes Black to be left with one peach between them.

'I suppose we had better halve it,' said Dolores sourly.

But Agnes was fat first and good natured afterwards, those were her guiding principles in life. She was profuse in her sympathy for Dolores, but she hastily devoured the peach, explaining that it would spoil it to divide it, the juice ran out so.

'Now what would you all like to do?' demanded Mrs Jallatt by way of a diversion. 'The professional

conjurer whom I had engaged has failed me at the last moment Can any of you recite ?'

There were symptoms of a general panic Dolores was known to recite 'Locksley Hall' on the least provocation There had been occasions when her opening line, 'Comrades, leave me here a little', had been taken as a literal injunction by a large section of her hearers There was a murmur of relief when Rollo hastily declared that he could do a few conjuring tricks He had never done one in his life, but those two visits to the library had goaded him to unusual recklessness

'You've seen conjuring chaps take coins and cards out of people,' he announced, 'well, I'm going to take more interesting things out of some of you Mice, for instance'

'Not mice!'

A shrill protest rose, as he had foreseen, from the majority of his audience

'Well, fruit, then'

The amended proposal was received with approval Agnes positively beamed

Without more ado Rollo made straight for his trio of enemies, plunged his hand successively into their breast-pockets, and produced three peaches There was no applause, but no amount of hand-clapping would have given the performer as much pleasure as the silence which greeted his coup

'Of course, we were in the know,' said the Wrotsley cousin lamely

'That's done it,' chuckled Rollo to himself

'If they *had* been confederates they would have sworn they knew nothing about it,' said Dolores, with piercing conviction

'Do you know any more tricks?' asked Mrs Jallatt hurriedly

Rollo did not He hinted that he might have changed the three peaches into something else, but Agnes had

already converted one into girl-food, so nothing more could be done in that direction

'I know a game,' said the elder Wrotsley heavily, 'where the fellows go out of the room, and think of some character in history, then they come back and act him, and the girls have to guess who it's meant for'

'I'm afraid I must be going,' said Rollo to his hostess

'Your carriage won't be here for another twenty minutes,' said Mrs Jallatt

'It's such a fine evening I think I'll walk and meet it'

'It's raining rather steadily at present You've just time to play that historical game'

'We haven't heard Dolores recite,' said Rollo desperately, as soon as he had said it he realized his mistake Confronted with the alternative of 'Locksley Hall', public opinion declared unanimously for the history game

Rollo played his last card In an undertone meant apparently for the Wrotsley boy, but carefully pitched to reach Agnes, he observed

'All right, old man, we'll go and finish those chocolates we left in the library'

'I think it's only fair that the girls should take their turn in going out,' exclaimed Agnes briskly She was great on fairness

'Nonsense,' said the others, 'there are too many of us'

'Well, four of us can go I'll be one of them'

And Agnes darted off towards the library, followed by three less eager damsels

Rollo sank into a chair and smiled ever so faintly at the Wrotsleys, just a momentary baring of the teeth, an otter, escaping from the fangs of the hounds into the safety of a deep pool, might have given a similar demonstration of its feelings

From the library came the sound of moving furniture  
Agnes was leaving nothing unturned in her quest for the  
mythical chocolates And then came a more blessed  
sound, wheels crunching wet gravel

'It has been a most enjoyable evening,' said Rollo to  
his hostess

# STEPHEN CRANE

(1871-1900)

## THE OPEN BOAT

A TALE INTENDED TO BE AFTER THE FACT BEING THE  
EXPERIENCE OF FOUR MEN FROM THE SUNK STEAMER  
COMMODORE

[From *The Open Boat, and other Stories* 1898]

### I

NONE of them knew the colour of the sky Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept towards them These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colours of the sea The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks

Many a man ought to have a bath tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each froth top was a problem in small boat navigation

The cook squatted in the bottom and looked with both eyes at the six inches of gunwale which separated him from the ocean His sleeves were rolled over his fat forearms, and the two flaps of his unbuttoned vest dangled as he bent to bail out the boat Often he said 'Gawd! That was a narrow clip' As he remarked it he invariably gazed eastward over the broken sea

The oiler, steering with one of the two oars in the boat, sometimes raised himself suddenly to keep clear of water that swirled in over the stern It was a thin little oar and it seemed often ready to snap

The correspondent, pulling at the other oar, watched the waves and wondered why he was there

The injured captain, lying in the bow, was at this time

buried in that profound dejection and indifference which comes, temporarily at least, to even the bravest and most enduring when, willy nilly, the firm fails, the army loses, the ship goes down. The mind of the master of a vessel is rooted deep in the timbers of her, though he commanded for a day or a decade, and this captain had on him the stern impression of a scene in the greys of dawn of seven turned faces, and later a stump of a topmast with a white ball on it that flashed to and fro at the waves, went low and lower, and down. Thereafter there was something strange in his voice. Although steady, it was deep with mourning, and of a quality beyond oration or tears.

'Keep 'er a little more south, Billie,' said he.

"A little more south," sir,' said the oiler in the stern.

A seat in this boat was not unlike a seat upon a bucking broncho, and, by the same token, a broncho is not much smaller. The craft pranced and reared, and plunged like an animal. As each wave came, and she rose for it, she seemed like a horse making at a fence outrageously high. The manner of her scramble over these walls of water is a mystic thing, and, moreover, at the top of them were ordinarily these problems in white water, the foam racing down from the summit of each wave, requiring a new leap, and a leap from the air. Then, after scornfully bumping a crest, she would slide, and race, and splash down a long incline, and arrive bobbing and nodding in front of the next menace.

A singular disadvantage of the sea lies in the fact that after successfully surmounting one wave you discover that there is another behind it just as important and just as nervously anxious to do something effective in the way of swamping boats. In a ten foot dinghy one can get an idea of the resources of the sea in the line of waves that is not probable to the average experience which is never at sea in a dinghy. As each slaty wall of water approached, it shut all else from the view of the men in the boat, and it was not difficult to imagine that

this particular wave was the final outburst of the ocean, the last effort of the grim water. There was a terrible grace in the move of the waves, and they came in silence, save for the snarling of the crests.

In the wan light, the faces of the men must have been grey. Their eyes must have glinted in strange ways as they gazed steadily astern. Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would doubtlessly have been weirdly picturesque. But the men in the boat had no time to see it, and if they had had leisure there were other things to occupy their minds. The sun swung steadily up the sky, and they knew it was broad day because the colour of the sea changed from slate to emerald green, streaked with amber lights, and the foam was like tumbling snow. The process of the breaking day was unknown to them. They were aware only of this effect upon the colour of the waves that rolled toward them.

In disjointed sentences the cook and the correspondent argued as to the difference between a life saving station and a house of refuge. The cook had said 'There's a house of refuge just north of the Mosquito Inlet Light, and as soon as they see us, they'll come off in their boat and pick us up.'

'As soon as who see us?,' said the correspondent.

'The crew,' said the cook.

'Houses of refuge don't have crews,' said the correspondent. 'As I understand them, they are only places where clothes and grub are stored for the benefit of shipwrecked people. They don't carry crews.'

'Oh, yes, they do,' said the cook.

'No, they don't,' said the correspondent.

'Well, we're not there yet, anyhow,' said the oiler, in the stern.

'Well,' said the cook, 'perhaps it's not a house of refuge that I'm thinking of as being near Mosquito Inlet Light. Perhaps it's a life saving station.'

'We're not there yet,' said the oiler, in the stern.



## II

As the boat bounced from the top of each wave, the wind tore through the hair of the hatless men, and as the craft plopped her stern down again the spray slashed past them. The crest of each of these waves was a hill, from the top of which the men surveyed, for a moment, a broad tumultuous expanse, shining and wind riven. It was probably splendid. It was probably glorious, this play of the free sea, wild with lights of emerald and white and amber.

'Bully good thing it's an on shore wind,' said the cook. 'If not, where would we be? Wouldn't have a show.'

'That's right,' said the correspondent.

The busy oiler nodded his assent.

Then the captain, in the bow, chuckled in a way that expressed humour, contempt, tragedy, all in one. 'Do you think we've got much of a show now, boys?' said he.

Whereupon the three were silent, save for a trifle of hemming and hawing. To express any particular optimism at this time they felt to be childish and stupid, but they all doubtless possessed this sense of the situation in their mind. A young man thinks doggedly at such times. On the other hand, the ethics of their condition was decidedly against any open suggestion of hopelessness. So they were silent.

'Oh, well,' said the captain, soothing his children, 'we'll get ashore all right.'

But there was that in his tone which made them think, so the oiler quoth 'Yes! If this wind holds!'

The cook was bailing. 'Yes! If we don't catch hell in the surf.'

Canton flannel gulls flew near and far. Sometimes they sat down on the sea, near patches of brown seaweed that rolled over the waves with a movement like carpets on a line in a gale. The birds sat comfortably

in groups, and they were envied by some in the dinghy, for the wrath of the sea was no more to them than it was to a covey of prairie chickens a thousand miles inland. Often they came very close and stared at the men with black bead like eyes. At these times they were uncanny and sinister in their unblinking scrutiny, and the men hooted angrily at them, telling them to be gone. One came, and evidently decided to alight on the top of the captain's head. The bird flew parallel to the boat and did not circle, but made short sidelong jumps in the air in chiel en fashion. His black eyes were wistfully fixed upon the captain's head. 'Ugly brute,' said the oiler to the bird. 'You look as if you were made with a jack knife.' The cook and the correspondent swore darkly at the creature. The captain naturally wished to knock it away with the end of the heavy painter, but he did not dare do it, because any thing resembling an emphatic gesture would have capsized this freighted boat, and so with his open hand, the captain gently and carefully waved the gull away. After it had been discouraged from the pursuit the captain breathed easier on account of his hair, and others breathed easier because the bird struck their minds at this time as being somehow gruesome and ominous.

In the meantime the oiler and the correspondent rowed. And also they rowed.

They sat together in the same seat, and each rowed an oar. Then the oiler took both oars, then the correspondent took both oars, then the oiler, then the correspondent. They rowed and they rowed. The very ticklish part of the business was when the time came for the reclining one in the stern to take his turn at the oars. By the very last state of truth, it is easier to steal eggs from under a hen than it was to change seats in the dinghy. First the man in the stern slid his hand along the thwart and moved with care, as if he were of Sevrès. Then the man in the rowing seat slid his hand along the other thwart. It was all done

with the most extraordinary care As the two sidled past each other, the whole party kept watchful eyes on the coming wave, and the captain cried 'Look out now! Steady there!'

The brown mats of sea weed that appeared from time to time were like islands, bits of earth They were travelling, apparently, neither one way nor the other They were, to all intents, stationary They informed the men in the boat that it was making progress slowly toward the land

The captain, rearing cautiously in the bow, after the dinghy soared on a great swell, said that he had seen the lighthouse at Mosquito Inlet Presently the cook remarked that he had seen it The correspondent was at the oars then, and for some reason he too wished to look at the lighthouse, but his back was toward the far shore and the waves were important, and for some time he could not seize an opportunity to turn his head But at last there came a wave more gentle than the others, and when at the crest of it he swiftly scoured the western horizon

'See it?' said the captain

'No,' said the correspondent slowly, 'I didn't see anything'

'Look again,' said the captain He pointed 'It's exactly in that direction'

At the top of another wave, the correspondent did as he was bid, and this time his eyes chanced on a small still thing on the edge of the swaying horizon It was precisely like the point of a pin It took an anxious eye to find a lighthouse so tiny

'Think we'll make it, captain?'

'If this wind holds and the boat don't swamp, we can't do much else,' said the captain

The little boat, lifted by each towering sea, and splashed viciously by the crests, made progress that in the absence of seaweed was not apparent to those in her She seemed just a wee thing wallowing, miracu-

lously top up, at the mercy of five oceans Occasionally, a great spread of water, like white flames, swarmed into her

'Bail her, cook,' said the captain serenely

'All right, captain,' said the cheerful cook

### III

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas No one said that it was so No one mentioned it But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him They were a captain, an oiler, a cook, and a correspondent, and they were friends, friends in a more curiously iron bound degree, than may be common The hurt captain, lying against the water jar in the bow, spoke always in a low voice and calmly, but he could never command a more ready and swiftly obedient crew than the motly three of the dinghy It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for the common safety There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heartfelt And after this devotion to the commander of the boat there was this comradeship that the correspondent, for instance, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time was the best experience of his life But no one said that it was so No one mentioned it

'I wish we had a sail,' remarked the captain 'We might try my overcoat on the end of an oar and give you two boys a chance to rest' So the cook and the correspondent held the mast and spread wide the overcoat The oiler steered, and the little boat made good way with her new rig Sometimes the oiler had to scull sharply to keep a sea from breaking into the boat, but otherwise sailing was a success

Meanwhile the lighthouse had been growing slowly larger It had now almost assumed colour, and appeared like a little grey shadow on the sky The man at the oars could not be prevented from turning his head

rather often to try for a glimpse of this little grey shadow

At last, from the top of each wave the men in the tossing boat could see land. Even as the lighthouse was an upright shadow on the sky, this land seemed but a long black shadow on the sea. It certainly was thinner than paper. 'We must be about opposite New Smyrna,' said the cook, who had coasted this shore often in schooners. 'Captain, by the way, I believe they abandoned that life saving station there about a year ago.'

'Did they?' said the captain.

The wind slowly died away. The cook and the correspondent were not now obliged to slave in order to hold high the oar. But the waves continued their old impetuous swooping at the dinghy, and the little craft, no longer under way, struggled woundily over them. The oiler or the correspondent took the oars again.

Shipwrecks are a propos of nothing. If men could only train for them and have them occur when the men had reached pink condition, there would be less drowning at sea. Of the four in the dinghy none had slept any time worth mentioning for two days and two nights previous to embarking in the dinghy, and in the excitement of clambering about the deck of a foundering ship they had also forgotten to eat heartily.

For these reasons, and for others, neither the oiler nor the correspondent was fond of rowing at this time. The correspondent wondered ingenuously how in the name of all that was sane could there be people who thought it amusing to row a boat. It was not an amusement, it was a diabolical punishment, and even a genius of mental aberrations could never conclude that it was anything but a horror to the muscles and a crime against the back. He mentioned to the boat in general how the amusement of rowing struck him, and the weary faced oiler smiled in full sympathy.

Previously to the foundering, by the way, the oiler had worked double watch in the engine room of the ship

'Take her easy, now, boys,' said the captain 'Don't spend yourselves If we have to run a surf you'll need all your strength, because we'll sure have to swim for it Take your time'

Slowly the land arose from the sea From a black line it became a line of black and a line of white, trees and sand Finally, the captain said that he could make out a house on the shore 'That's the house of refuge, sure,' said the cook 'They'll see us before long, and come out after us'

The distant lighthouse reared high 'The keeper ought to be able to make us out now, if he's looking through a glass,' said the captain 'He'll notify the life saving people'

'None of those other boats could have got ashore to give word of the wreck,' said the oiler, in a low voice 'Else the lifeboat would be out hunting us'

Slowly and beautifully the land loomed out of the sea The wind came again It had veered from the north east to the south east Finally, a new sound struck the ears of the men in the boat It was the low thunder of the surf on the shore 'We'll never be able to make the lighthouse now,' said the captain 'Swing her head a little more north, Billie,' said he

"A little more north," sir,' said the oiler

Whereupon the little boat turned her nose once more down the wind, and all but the oarsman watched the shore grow Under the influence of this expansion doubt and direful apprehension was leaving the minds of the men The management of the boat was still most absorbing, but it could not prevent a quiet cheerfulness In an hour, perhaps, they would be ashore

Their backbones had become thoroughly used to balancing in the boat, and they now rode this wild colt of a dinghy like circus men The correspondent thought that he had been drenched to the skin, but

happening to feel in the top pocket of his coat, he found therein eight cigars. Four of them were soaked with sea water, four were perfectly scatheless. After a search, somebody produced three dry match's, and thereupon the four waifs rode impudently in their little boat, and with an assurance of an impending rescue shining in their eyes, puffed at the big cigars and judged well and ill of all men. Everybody took a drink of water.

#### IV

'Cook,' remarked the captain, 'there don't seem to be any signs of life about your house of refuge.'

'No,' replied the cook. 'Funny they don't see us!'

A broad stretch of lowly coast lay before the eyes of the men. It was of dunes topped with dark vegetation. The roar of the surf was plain, and sometimes they could see the white lip of a wave as it spun up the beach. A tiny house was blocked out black upon the sky. Southward, the slim lighthouse lifted its little grey length.

Tide, wind, and waves were swinging the dinghy northward. 'Funny they don't see us,' said the men.

The surf's roar was here dulled, but its tone, was, nevertheless, thunderous and mighty. As the boat swam over the great rollers, the men sat listening to this roar. 'We'll swamp sure,' said everybody.

It is fair to say here that there was not a life saving station within twenty miles in either direction, but the men did not know this fact, and in consequence they made dark and opprobrious remarks concerning the eyesight of the nation's life savers. Four scowling men sat in the dinghy and surpassed records in the invention of epithets.

'Funny they don't see us.'

The light heartedness of a former time had completely faded. To their sharpened minds it was easy to conjure pictures of all kinds of incompetency and blindness and, indeed, cowardice. There was the shore of the populous

land, and it was bitter and bitter to them that from it came no sign

'Well,' said the captain, ultimately, 'I suppose we'll have to make a try for ourselves. If we stay out here too long, we'll none of us have strength left to swim after the boat swamps.'

And so the oiler, who was at the oars, turned the boat straight for the shore. There was a sudden tightening of muscles. There was some thinking.

'If we don't all get ashore—' said the captain. 'If we don't all get ashore, I suppose you fellows know where to send news of my finish?'

They then briefly exchanged some addresses and admonitions. As for the reflections of the men, there was a great deal of rage in them. Perchance they might be formulated thus: 'If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life? It is preposterous. If this old nunny woman, Fate, cannot do better than this, she should be deprived of the management of men's fortunes. She is an old hen who knows not her intention. If she has decided to drown me, why did she not do it in the beginning and save me all this trouble? The whole affair is absurd. But no, she cannot mean to drown me. She dare not drown me. She cannot drown me. Not after all this work.' Afterwards the man might have had an impulse to shake his fist at the clouds. 'Just you drown me, now, and then hear what I call you!'

The billows that came at this time were more formidable. They seemed always just about to break and roll over the little boat in a turmoil of foam. There was a preparatory and long growl in the speech of them. No mind unused to the sea would have concluded that the



dinghy could ascend these sheer heights in time The shore was still afar The oiler was a wily surferman 'Boys,' he said swiftly, 'she won't live three minutes more, and we're too far out to swim Shall I take her to sea again, captain?'

'Yes! Go ahead!' said the captain

This oiler, by a series of quick miracles, and fast and steady oarsmanship, turned the boat in the middle of the surf and took her safely to sea again

There was a considerable silence as the boat bumped over the furrowed sea to deeper water Then somebody in gloom spoke 'Well, anyhow, they must have seen us from the shore by now'

The gulls went in slanting flight up the wind toward the grey desolate east. A squall, marked by dingy clouds, and clouds brick red, like smoke from a burning building, appeared from the south east

'What do you think of those life-saving people? Ain't they peaches?'

'Funny they haven't seen us'

'Maybe they think we're out here for sport' Maybe they think we're fishin' Maybe they think we're damned fools'

It was a long afternoon A changed tide tried to force them southward, but wind and wave said north ward Far ahead, where coast line, sea, and sky formed their mighty angle, there were little dots which seemed to indicate a city on the shore

'St Augustine?'

The captain shook his head 'Too near Mosquito Inlet'

And the oiler rowed, and then the correspondent rowed Then the oiler rowed It was a weary business The human back can become the seat of more aches and pains than are registered in books for the composite anatomy of a regiment It is a limited area, but it can become the theatre of innumerable muscular conflicts, tangles, wrenches, knots, and other comforts

' Did you ever like to row, Billie ? ' asked the correspondent

No,' said the oiler ' Hang it '

When one exchanged the rowing seat for a place in the bottom of the boat, he suffered a bodily depression that caused him to be careless of everything save an obligation to wiggle one finger. There was cold sea water swashing to and fro in the boat, and he lay in it. His head, pillowed on a thwart, was within an inch of the swirl of a wave crest, and sometimes a particularly obstreperous sea came in board and drenched him once more. But these matters did not annoy him. It is almost certain that if the boat had capsized he would have tumbled comfortably out upon the ocean as if he felt sure that it was a great soft mattress.

' Look ! There's a man on the shore ! '

' Where ? '

' There ! See 'im ? See 'im ? '

' Yes, sure ! He's walking along '

' Now he's stopped. Look ! He's facing us ! '

' He's waving at us ! '

' So he is ! By thunder ! '

' Ah, now we're all right ! Now we're all right ! There'll be a boat out here for us in half an hour '

' He's going on. He's running. He's going up to that house there '

The remote beach seemed lower than the sea, and it required a searching glance to discern the little black figure. The captain saw a floating stick and they rowed to it. A bath towel was by some weird chance in the boat, and, tying this on the stick, the captain waved it. The oarsman did not dare turn his head, so he was obliged to ask questions.

' What's he doing now ? '

' He's standing still again. He's looking, I think.

There he goes again. Towards the house. Now he's stopped again '

Is he waving at us ? '

'No, not now' he was, though'

'Look! There comes another man!'

'He's running'

'Look at him go, would you'

'Why, he's on a bicycle Now he's met the other man They're both waving at us Look!'

'There comes something up the beach'

'What the devil is that thing?'

'Why, it looks like a boat'

'Why, certainly it's a boat'

'No, it's on wheels'

'Yes, so it is Well, that must be the life boat They drag them along shore on a wagon'

'That's the life-boat, sure'

'No, by—, it's—it's an omnibus'

'I tell you it's a life boat'

'It is not! It's an omnibus I can see it plain See? One of these big hotel omnibuses'

'By thunder, you're right It's an omnibus, sure as fate What do you suppose they are doing with an omnibus? Maybe they are going around collecting the life-crew, hey?'

'That's it, likely Look! There's a fellow waving a little black flag He's standing on the steps of the omnibus There come those other two fellows Now they're all talking together Look at the fellow with the flag Maybe he ain't waving it'

'That ain't a flag, is it? That's his coat Why certainly, that's his coat'

'So it is It's his coat He's taken it off and is waving it around his head But would you look at him swing it'

'Oh, say, there isn't any life saving station there That's just a winter resort hotel omnibus that has brought over some of the boarders to see us drown'

'What's that idiot with the coat mean? What's he signalling, anyhow?'

'It looks as if he were trying to tell us to go north  
There must be a life saving station up there'

'No! He thinks we're fishing Just giving us a  
merry hand See? Ah, there, Willie'

'Well, I wish I could make something out of those  
signals What do you suppose he means?'

'He don't mean anything He's just playing'

'Well, if he'd just signal us to try the surf again, or  
to go to sea and wait, or go north, or go south, or go  
to hell—there would be some reason in it But look at  
him He just stands there and keeps his coat revolving  
like a wheel The ass!'

'There come more people'

'Now there's quite a mob Look! Isn't that a  
boat?'

'Where? Oh, I see where you mean No, that's  
no boat'

'That fellow is still waving his coat'

'He must think we like to see him do that Why  
don't he quit it? It don't mean anything'

'I don't know I think he is trying to make us go  
north It must be that there's a life saving station  
there somewhere'

'Say, he ain't tired yet Look at 'im wave'

'Wonder how long he can keep that up He's been  
revolving his coat ever since he caught sight of us  
He's an idiot Why aren't they getting men to bring  
a boat out? A fishing boat—one of those big yawls  
—could come out here all right Why don't he do  
something?'

'Oh, it's all right, now'

'They'll have a boat out here for us in less than no  
time, now that they've seen us'

A faint yellow tone came into the sky over the low  
land The shadows on the sea slowly deepened The  
wind bore coldness with it, and the men began to  
shiver

'Holy smoke!' said one, allowing his voice to express

his impious mood, 'if we keep on monkeying out here! If we've got to flounder out here all night!'

'Oh, we'll never have to stay here all night! Don't you worry. They've seen us now, and it won't be long before they'll come chasing out after us.'

The shore grew dusky. The man waving a coat blended gradually into this gloom, and it swallowed in the same manner the omnibus and the group of people. The spray, when it dashed uproariously over the side, made the voyagers shrink and swear like men who were being branded.

'I'd like to catch the chump who waved the coat. I feel like soaking him one, just for luck.'

'Why? What did he do?'

'Oh, nothing, but then he seemed so damned cheerful.'

In the meantime the oiler rowed, and then the correspondent rowed, and then the oiler rowed. Grey faced and bowed forward, they mechanically, turn by turn, plied the leaden oars. The form of the lighthouse had vanished from the southern horizon, but finally a pale star appeared, just lifting from the sea. The streaked saffron in the west passed before the all merging darkness, and the sea to the east was black. The land had vanished, and was expressed only by the low and drear thunder of the surf.

'If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life?'

The patient captain, drooped over the water jar, was sometimes obliged to speak to the oarsman.

'Keep her head up! Keep her head up!'

'"Keep her head up," sir.' The voices were weary and low.

This was surely a quiet evening. All save the oarsman lay heavily and listlessly in the boat's bottom. As for him, his eyes were just capable of noting the tall black waves that swept forward in a most sinister silence, save for an occasional subdued growl of a crest.

The cook's head was on a thwart, and he looked without interest at the water under his nose. He was deep in other scenes. Finally he spoke. 'Billie,' he murmured, dreamfully, 'what kind of pie do you like best?'

## V

'Pie,' said the oiler and the correspondent, agitatedly. 'Don't talk about those things, blast you!'

'Well,' said the cook, 'I was just thinking about ham sandwiches, and—'

A night on the sea in an open boat is a long night. As darkness settled finally, the shine of the light, lifting from the sea in the south, changed to full gold. On the northern horizon a new light appeared, a small bluish gleam on the edge of the waters. These two lights were the furniture of the world. Otherwise there was nothing but waves.

Two men huddled in the stern, and distances were so magnificent in the dinghy that the rower was enabled to keep his feet partly warmed by thrusting them under his companions. Their legs indeed extended far under the rowing seat until they touched the feet of the captain forward. Sometimes, despite the efforts of the tired oarsman, a wave came piling into the boat, an icy wave of the night, and the chilling water soaked them anew. They would twist their bodies for a moment and groan, and sleep the dead sleep once more, while the water in the boat gurgled about them as the craft rocked.

The plan of the oiler and the correspondent was for one to row until he lost the ability, and then arouse the other from his sea water couch in the bottom of the boat.

The oiler plied the oars until his head drooped forward, and the overpowering sleep blinded him. And he rowed yet afterward. Then he touched a r-ran in the bottom of the boat, and called his name. 'Will you spell me for a little while?' he said meekly.

'Sure, Billie,' said the correspondent, awakening and dragging himself to a sitting position. They exchanged places carefully, and the oiler, cuddling down in the seawater at the cook's side, seemed to go to sleep instantly.

The particular violence of the sea had ceased. The waves came without snarling. The obligation of the man at the oars was to keep the boat headed so that the tilt of the rollers would not capsize her, and to preserve her from filling when the crests rushed past. The black waves were silent and hard to be seen in the darkness. Often one was almost upon the boat before the oarsman was aware.

In a low voice the correspondent addressed the captain. He was not sure that the captain was awake, although this iron man seemed to be always awake. 'Captain, shall I keep her making for that light north, sir?'

The same steady voice answered him. 'Yes. Keep it about two points off the port bow.'

The cook had tied a life belt around himself in order to get even the warmth which this clumsy cork contrivance could donate, and he seemed almost stove like when a rower, whose teeth invariably chattered wildly as soon as he ceased his labour, dropped down to sleep.

The correspondent, as he rowed, looked down at the two men sleeping underfoot. The cook's arm was around the oiler's shoulders, and, with their fragmentary clothing and haggard faces, they were the babes of the sea, a grotesque rendering of the old babes in the wood.

Later he must have grown stupid at his work, for suddenly there was a growling of water, and a crest came with a roar and a swash into the boat, and it was a wonder that it did not set the cook afloat in his life-

belt The cook continued to sleep, but the oiler sat up, blinking his eyes and shaking with the new cold

'Oh, I'm awful sorry, Billie,' said the correspondent contritely

'That's all right, old boy,' said the oiler, and lay down again and was asleep

Presently it seemed that even the captain dozed, and the correspondent thought that he was the one man afloat on all the oceans The wind had a voice as it came over the waves, and it was sadder than the end

There was a long, loud swishing astern of the boat, and a gleaming trail of phosphorescence, like blue flame, was furrowed on the black waters It might have been made by a monstrous knife

Then there came a stillness, while the correspondent breathed with the open mouth and looked at the sea

Suddenly there was another swish and another long flash of bluish light, and this time it was alongside the boat, and might almost have been reached with an oar The correspondent saw an enormous fin speed like a shadow through the water, hurling the crystalline spray and leaving the long glowing trail

The correspondent looked over his shoulder at the captain His face was hidden, and he seemed to be asleep He looked at the babes of the sea They certainly were asleep So, being bereft of sympathy, he leaned a little way to one side and swore softly into the sea

But the thing did not then leave the vicinity of the boat Ahead or astern, on one side or the other, at intervals long or short, fled the long sparkling streak, and there was to be heard the whirloo of the dark fin The speed and power of the thing was greatly to be admired It cut the water like a gigantic and keen projectile

The presence of this bidding thing did not affect the man with the same horror that it would if he had been



a picnicker He simply looked at the sea dully and swore in an undertone

Nevertheless, it is true that he did not wish to be alone He wished one of his companions to awaken by chance and keep him company with it But the captain hung motionless over the water jar, and the oiler and the cook in the bottom of the boat were plunged in slumber

## VI

'If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees ?'

During this dismal night, it may be remarked that a man would conclude that it was really the intention of the seven mad gods to drown him, despite the abominable injustice of it For it was certainly an abominable injustice to drown a man who had worked so hard, so hard The man felt it would be a crime most unnatural Other people had drowned at sea since galleys swarmed with painted sails, but still—

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers

Then, if there be no tangible thing to hoot he feels, perhaps, the desire to confront a personification and indulge in pleas, bowed to one knee, and with hands supplicant, saying ' Yes, but I love myself '

A high cold star on a winter's night is the word he feels that she says to him Thereafter he knows the pathos of his situation

The men in the dinghy had not discussed these

matters, but each had, no doubt, reflected upon them in silence and according to his mind. There was seldom any expression upon their faces save the general one of complete weariness. Speech was devoted to the business of the boat.

To chime the notes of his emotion, a verse mysteriously entered the correspondent's head. He had even forgotten that he had forgotten this verse, but it suddenly was in his mind.

A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers,  
There was lack of woman's nursing, there was dearth of  
woman's tears,  
But a comrade stood beside him and he took that com-  
rade's hand,  
And he said 'I shall never see my own, my native land.'

In his childhood, the correspondent had been made acquainted with the fact that a soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers, but he had never regarded the fact as important. Myriads of his school fellows had informed him of the soldier's plight, but the dinnings had, naturally ended by making him perfectly indifferent. He had never considered it his affair that a soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers, nor had it appeared to him as a matter for sorrow. It was less to him than the breaking of a pencil's point.

Now, however, it quaintly came to him as a human, living thing. It was no longer merely a picture of a few throes in the breast of a poet, meanwhile drinking tea and warming his feet at the grate, it was an actuality—stern, mournful, and fine.

The correspondent plainly saw the soldier. He lay on the sand with his feet out straight and still. While his pale left hand was upon his chest in an attempt to thwart the going of his life, the blood came between his fingers. In the far Algerian distance, a city of low square forms was set against a sky that was faint with the last sunset hues. The correspondent, plying the

oars and dreaming of the slow and slower movements of the lips of the soldier, was moved by a profound and perfectly impersonal comprehension. He was sorry for the soldier of the Legion who lay dying in Algiers.

The thing which had followed the boat and waited, had evidently grown bored at the delay. There was no longer to be heard the splash of the cut water, and there was no longer the flame of the long trail. The light in the north still glimmered, but it was apparently no nearer to the boat. Sometimes the boom of the surf rang in the correspondent's ears, and he turned the craft seaward then and rowed harder. Southward, some one had evidently built a watch fire on the beach. It was too low and too far to be seen, but it made a shimmering, roseate reflection upon the bluff back of it, and this could be discerned from the boat. The wind came stronger, and sometimes a wave suddenly raged out like a mountain cat, and there was to be seen the sheen and sparkle of a broken crest.

The captain, in the bow, moved on his water jar and sat erect. 'Pretty long night,' he observed to the correspondent. He looked at the shore. 'Those life saving people take their time.'

'Did you see that shark playing around?'

'Yes, I saw him. He was a big fellow, all right.'

'Wish I had known you were awake.'

Later the correspondent spoke into the bottom of the boat.

'Billie!' There was a slow and gradual disentanglement. 'Billie, will you spell me?'

'Sure,' said the oiler.

As soon as the correspondent touched the cold comfortable sea water in the bottom of the boat, and had huddled close to the cook's life belt he was deep in sleep, despite the fact that his teeth played all the popular airs. This sleep was so good to him that it was but a moment before he heard a voice call his name.

in a tone that demonstrated the last stages of exhaustion 'Will you spell me?'

'Sure, Billie'

The light in the north had mysteriously vanished, but the correspondent took his course from the wide awake captain

Later in the night they took the boat farther out to sea, and the captain directed the cook to take one oar at the stern and keep the boat facing the seas. He was to call out if he should hear the thunder of the surf. This plan enabled the oiler and the correspondent to get respite together. 'We'll give those boys a chance to get into shape again,' said the captain. They curled down and, after a few preliminary chatterings and trembles, slept once more the dead sleep. Neither knew they had bequeathed to the cook the company of another shark, or perhaps the same shark.

As the boat caroused on the waves, spray occasionally bumped over the side and gave them a fresh soaking, but this had no power to break their repose. The ominous slash of the wind and the water affected them as it would have affected mummies.

'Boys,' said the cook, with the notes of every reluctance in his voice, 'she's drifted in pretty close. I guess one of you had better take her to sea again.' The correspondent, aroused, heard the crash of the toppled crests.

As he was rowing, the captain gave him some whisky and water, and this steadied the chills out of him. 'If I ever get ashore and anybody shows me even a photograph of an oar—'

At last there was a short conversation.

'Billie, Billie, will you spell me?'

'Sure,' said the oiler.

## VII

When the correspondent again opened his eyes, the sea and the sky were each of the grey hue of the dawn-ing. Later, carmine and gold was painted upon the

waters The morning appeared finally, in its splendour, with a sky of pure blue, and the sunlight flamed on the tips of the waves

On the distant dunes were set many little black cottages, and a tall white windmill reared above them No man, nor dog, nor bicycle appeared on the beach The cottages might have formed a deserted village

The voyagers scanned the shore, A conference was held in the boat 'Well,' said the captain, 'if no help is coming we might better try a run through the surf right away If we stay out here much longer we will be too weak to do anything for ourselves at all' The others silently acquiesced in this reasoning The boat was headed for the beach The correspondent wondered if none ever ascended the tall wind tower, and if then they never looked seaward This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual—nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent It is, perhaps, plausible that a man in this situation, impressed with the unconcern of the universe, should see the innumerable flaws of his life, and have them taste wickedly in his mind and wish for another chance A distinction between right and wrong seems absurdly clear to him, then, in this new ignorance of the grave edge, and he understands that if he were given another opportunity he would mend his conduct and his words and be better and brighter during an introduction or at a tea

'Now, boys,' said the captain, 'she is going to swamp, sure All we can do is to work her in as far as possible, and then when she swamps, pile out and scramble for the beach Keep cool now, and don't jump until she swamps sure'

The oiler took the oars Over his shoulders he scanned

the surf 'Captain,' he said, 'I think I'd better bring her about, and keep her head on to the seas and back her in.'

'All right, Billie,' said the captain 'Back her in.' The oiler swung the boat then and, seated in the stern, the cook and the correspondent were obliged to look over their shoulders to contemplate the lonely and indifferent shore.

The monstrous in shore rollers heaved the boat high until the men were again enabled to see the white sheets of water scudding up the slanted beach. 'We won't get in very close,' said the captain. Each time a man could wrest his attention from the rollers, he turned his glance towards the shore, and in the expression of the eyes during this contemplation there was a singular quality. The correspondent, observing the others, knew that they were not afraid, but the full meaning of their glances was shrouded.

As for himself, he was too tired to grapple fundamentally with the fact. He tried to coerce his mind into thinking of it, but the mind was dominated at this time by the muscles, and the muscles said they did not care. It merely occurred to him that if he should drown it would be a shame.

There were no hurried words, no pallor, no plain agitation. The men simply looked at the shore. 'Now, remember to get well clear of the boat when you jump,' said the captain.

Seaward the crest of a roller suddenly fell with a thunderous crash, and the long white comber came roaring down upon the boat.

'Steady now,' said the captain. The men were silent. They turned their eyes from the shore to the comber and waited. The boat slid up the incline, leaped at the furious top, bounced over it, and swung down the long back of the wave. Some water had been shipped and the cook bailed it out.

But the next crest crashed also. The tumbling bowl

ing flood of white water caught the boat and whirled it almost perpendicular. Water swarmed in from all sides. The correspondent had his hands on the gun wale at this time, and when the water entered at that place he swiftly withdrew his fingers, as if he objected to wetting them.

The little boat, drunken with this weight of water, reeled and snuggled deeper into the sea.

'Bail her out, cook!' Bail her out,' said the captain.

'All right, captain,' said the cook.

'Now, boys, the next one will do for us, sure,' said the oiler. 'Mind to jump clear of the boat.'

The third wave moved forward, huge, furious, implacable. It fairly swallowed the dinghy, and almost simultaneously the men tumbled into the sea. A piece of lifebelt had lain in the bottom of the boat, and as the correspondent went overboard he held this to his chest with his left hand.

The January water was icy, and he reflected immediately that it was colder than he had expected to find it off the coast of Florida. This appeared to his dazed mind as a fact important enough to be noted at the time. The coldness of the water was sad, it was tragic. This fact was somehow so mixed and confused with his opinion of his own situation that it seemed almost a proper reason for tears. The water was cold.

When he came to the surface he was conscious of little but the noisy water. Afterwards he saw his companions in the sea. The oiler was ahead in the race. He was swimming strongly and rapidly. Off to the correspondent's left, the cook's great white and corked back bulged out of the water, and in the rear the captain was hanging with his one good hand to the keel of the overturned dinghy.

There is a certain immovable quality to a shore, and the correspondent wondered at it amid the confusion of the sea.

It seemed also very attractive, but the correspondent knew that it was a long journey, and he paddled leisurely. The piece of life preserver lay under him, and sometimes he whirled down the incline of a wave as if he were on a hand sled.

But finally he arrived at a place in the sea where travel was beset with difficulty. He did not pause swimming to inquire what manner of current had caught him, but there his progress ceased. The shore was set before him like a bit of scenery on a stage, and he looked at it and understood with his eyes each detail of it.

As the cook passed, much farther to the left, the captain was calling to him, 'Turn over on your back, cook! Turn over on your back and use the oar.'

'All right, sir.' The cook turned on his back, and, paddling with an oar, went ahead as if he were a canoe.

Presently the boat also passed to the left of the correspondent with the captain clinging with one hand to the keel. He would have appeared like a man raising himself to look over a board fence, if it were not for the extraordinary gymnastics of the boat. The correspondent marvelled that the captain could still hold to it.

They passed on, nearer to shore—the oiler, the cook, the captain—and following them went the water jar, bouncing gaily over the seas.

The correspondent remained in the grip of this strange new enemy—a current. The shore, with its white slope of sand and its green bluff, topped with little silent cottages, was spread like a picture before him. It was very near to him then, but he was impressed as one who in a gallery looks at a scene from Brittany or Holland.

He thought, 'I am going to drown? Can it be possible? Can it be possible? Can it be possible?' Perhaps an individual must consider his own death to be the final phenomenon of nature.

But later a wave perhaps whirled him out of this



small deadly current, for he found suddenly that he could again make progress toward the shore. Later still, he was aware that the captain, clinging with one hand to the keel of the dinghy, had his face turned away from the shore and toward him, and was calling his name 'Come to the boat! Come to the boat!'

In his struggle to reach the captain and the boat, he reflected that when one gets properly wearied, drowning must really be a comfortable arrangement, a cessation of hostilities accompanied by a large degree of relief, and he was glad of it, for the main thing in his mind for some moments had been horror of the temporary agony. He did not wish to be hurt.

Presently he saw a man running along the shore. He was undressing with most remarkable speed. Coat, trousers, shirt, everything flew magically off him.

'Come to the boat,' called the captain.

'All right, captain.' As the correspondent paddled, he saw the captain let himself down to bottom and leave the boat. Then the correspondent performed his one little marvel of the voyage. A large wave caught him and flung him with ease and supreme speed completely over the boat and far beyond it. It struck him even then as an event in gymnastics, and a true miracle of the sea. An overturned boat in the surf is not a plaything to a swimming man.

The correspondent arrived in water that reached only to his waist, but his condition did not enable him to stand for more than a moment. Each wave knocked him into a heap, and the under tow pulled at him.

Then he saw the man who had been running and undressing, and undressing and running, come bounding into the water. He dragged ashore the cook, and then waded towards the captain, but the captain waved him away, and sent him to the correspondent. He was naked, naked as a tree in winter, but a halo was about his head, and he shone like a saint. He gave a strong

pull, and a long drag, and a bully heave at the correspondent's hand. The correspondent, schooled in the minor formulae, said 'Thanks, old man.' But suddenly the man cried 'What's that?' He pointed a swift finger. The correspondent said 'Go.'

In the shallows, face downwards, lay the oiler. His forehead touched sand that was periodically, between each wave, clear of the sea.

The correspondent did not know all that transpired afterwards. When he achieved safe ground he fell, striking the sand with each particular part of his body. It was as if he had dropped from a roof, but the thud was grateful to him.

It seems that instantly the beach was populated with men with blankets, clothes, and flasks, and women with coffee pots and all the remedies sacred to their minds. The welcome of the land to the men from the sea was warm and generous, but a still and dripping shape was carried slowly up the beach, and the land's welcome for it could only be the different and sinister hospitality of the grave.

When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea's voice to the men on shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters.

# RICHARD BARHAM MIDDLETON

(1882-1911)

## THE GHOST SHIP

[From *The Ghost Ship* 1912]

FAIRFIELD is a little village lying near the Ports mouth Road about half way between London and the sea. Strangers who find it by accident now and then, call it a pretty, old fashioned place, we who live in it and call it home don't find anything very pretty about it, but we should be sorry to live anywhere else. Our minds have taken the shape of the inn and the church and the green, I suppose. At all events we never feel comfortable out of Fairfield.

Of course the Cockneys, with their vasty houses and noise ridden streets, can call us rustics if they choose, but for all that Fairfield is a better place to live in than London. Doctor says that when he goes to London his mind is bruised with the weight of the houses, and he was a Cockney born. He had to live there himself when he was a little chap, but he knows better now. You gentlemen may laugh—perhaps some of you come from London way—but it seems to me that a witness like that is worth a gallon of arguments.

Dull? Well, you might find it dull, but I assure you that I've listened to all the London yarns you have spun to night, and they're absolutely nothing to the things that happen at Fairfield. It's because of our way of thinking and minding our own business. If one of your Londoners were set down on the green of a Saturday night when the ghosts of the lads who died in the war keep tryst with the lasses who lie in the churchyard, he couldn't help being curious and interfering, and then the ghosts would go somewhere where it was quieter.

But we just let them come and go and don't make any fuss, and in consequence Fairfield is the ghostiest place in all England. Why, I've seen a headless man sitting on the edge of the well in broad daylight, and the children playing about his feet as if he were their father. Take my word for it, spirits know when they are well off as much as human beings.

Still, I must admit that the thing I'm going to tell you about was queer even for our part of the world, where three packs of ghost hounds hunt regularly during the season, and blacksmith's great-grandfather is busy all night shoeing the dead gentlemen's horses. Now that's a thing that wouldn't happen in London, because of their interfering ways, but blacksmith he lies up aloft and sleeps as quiet as a lamb. Once when he had a bad head he shouted down to them not to make so much noise, and in the morning he found an old guinea left on the anvil as an apology. He wears it on his watch-chain now. But I must get on with my story, if I start telling you about the queer happenings at Fairfield I'll never stop.

It all came of the great storm in the spring of '97, the year that we had two great storms. This was the first one, and I remember it very well, because I found in the morning that it had lifted the thatch of my pigsty into the widow's garden as clean as a boy's kite. When I looked over the hedge, widow—Tom Lamport's widow that was—was prodding for her nasturtiums with a daisy grubber. After I had watched her for a little I went down to the 'Fox and Grapes' to tell landlord what she had said to me. Landlord he laughed, being a married man and at ease with the sex. 'Come to that,' he said, 'the tempest has blowed something into my field. A kind of a ship I think it would be.'

I was surprised at that until he explained that it was only a ghost ship and would do no hurt to the turnips. We argued that it had been blown up from the sea at Portsmouth, and then we talked of something else.

There were two slates down at the parsonage and a big tree in Lumley's meadow. It was a rare storm.

I reckon the wind had blown our ghosts all over England. They were coming back for days afterwards with foundered horses and as footsore as possible, and they were so glad to get back to Fairfield that some of them walked up the street crying like little children. Squire said that his great grandfather's great grandfather hadn't looked so dead beat since the battle of Naseby, and he's an educated man.

What with one thing and another, I should think it was a week before we got straight again, and then one afternoon I met the landlord on the green and he had a worried face. 'I wish you'd come and have a look at that ship in my field,' he said to me, 'it seems to me it's leaning real hard on the turnips. I can't bear thinking what the missus will say when she sees it.'

I walked down the lane with him, and sure enough there was a ship in the middle of his field, but such a ship as no man had seen on the water for three hundred years, let alone in the middle of a turnip field. It was all painted black and covered with carvings, and there was a great bay window in the stern for all the world like the Squire's drawing room. There was a crowd of little black cannon on deck and looking out of her port holes, and she was anchored at each end to the hard ground. I have seen the wonders of the world on picture postcards, but I have never seen anything to equal that.

'She seems very solid for a ghost ship,' I said, seeing the landlord was bothered.

'I should say it's a betwixt and between,' he answered, puzzling it over, 'but it's going to spoil a matter of fifty turnips, and missus she'll want it moved.' We went up to her and touched the side, and it was as hard as a real ship. 'Now there's folks in England would call that very curious,' he said.

Now I don't know much about ships, but I should

think that that ghost ship weighed a solid two hundred tons, and it seemed to me that she had come to stay, so that I felt sorry for landlord, who was a married man 'All the horses in Fairfield won't move her out of my turnips,' he said, frowning at her

Just then we heard a noise on her deck, and we looked up and saw that a man had come out of her front cabin and was looking down at us very peaceably. He was dressed in a black uniform set out with rusty gold lace, and he had a great cutlass by his side in a brass sheath 'I'm Captain Bartholomew Roberts,' he said, in a gentleman's voice, 'put in for recruits. I seem to have brought her rather far up the harbour'

'Harbour!' cried landlord, 'why, you're fifty miles from the sea'

Captain Roberts didn't turn a hair 'So much as that, is it?' he said coolly 'Well, it's of no consequence'

Landlord was a bit upset at this 'I don't want to be unneighbourly,' he said, 'but I wish you hadn't brought your ship into my field. You see, my wife sets great store on these turnips'

The captain took a pinch of snuff out of a fine gold box that he pulled out of his pocket, and dusted his fingers with a silk handkerchief in a very genteel fashion 'I'm only here for a few months,' he said, 'but if a testimony of my esteem would pacify your good lady I should be content,' and with the words he loosed a great gold brooch from the neck of his coat and tossed it down to landlord

Landlord blushed as red as a strawberry 'I'm not denying she's fond of jewellery,' he said, 'but it's too much for half a sackful of turnips' And indeed it was a handsome brooch

The captain laughed 'Tut, man,' he said, 'it's a forced sale, and you deserve a good price. Say no more about it', and nodding good-day to us, he turned on his heel and went into the cabin. Landlord walked

back up the lane like a man with a weight off his mind 'That tempest has blowed me a bit of luck,' he said, 'the missus will be main pleased with that brooch. It's better than blacksmith's guinea, any day'

Ninety-seven was Jubilee year, the year of the second Jubilee, you remember, and we had great doings at Fairfield, so that we hadn't much time to bother about the ghost ship, though anyhow it isn't our way to meddle in things that don't concern us. Landlord, he saw his tenant once or twice when he was hoeing his turnips and passed the time of day, and landlord's wife wore her new brooch to church every Sunday. But we didn't mix much with the ghosts at any time, all except an idiot lad there was in the village, and he didn't know the difference between a man and a ghost, poor innocent! On Jubilee Day, however, somebody told Captain Roberts why the church bells were ringing, and he hoisted a flag and fired off his guns like a loyal Englishman. 'Tis true the guns were shotted, and one of the round shot knocked a hole in Farmer Johnstone's barn, but nobody thought much of that in such a season of rejoicing.

It wasn't till our celebrations were over that we noticed that anything was wrong in Fairfield. 'Twas shoemaker who told me first about it one morning at the 'Fox and Grapes'. 'You know my great-uncle?' he said to me.

'You mean Joshua, the quiet lad,' I answered, knowing him well.

'Quiet!' said shoemaker indignantly. 'Quiet you call him, coming home at three o'clock every morning as drunk as a magistrate and waking up the whole house with his noise.'

'Why, it can't be Joshua!' I said, for I knew him for one of the most respectable young ghosts in the village.

'Joshua it is,' said shoemaker, 'and one of these nights he'll find himself out in the street if he isn't careful.'

This kind of talk shocked me, I can tell you, for I don't like to hear a man abusing his own family, and I could hardly believe that a steady youngster like Joshua had taken to drink. But just then in came butcher Aylwin in such a temper that he could hardly drink his beer. 'The young puppy! the young puppy!' he kept on saying, and it was some time before shoemaker and I found out that he was talking about his ancestor that fell at Senlac.

'Drink?' said shoemaker hopefully, for we all like company in our misfortunes, and butcher nodded grimly.

'The young noodle,' he said, emptying his tankard.

Well, after that I kept my ears open, and it was the same story all over the village. There was hardly a young man among all the ghosts of Fairfield who didn't roll home in the small hours of the morning the worse for liquor. I used to wake up in the night and hear them stumble past my house, singing outrageous songs. The worst of it was that we couldn't keep the scandal to ourselves, and the folk at Greenhill began to talk of 'sodden Fairfield' and taught their children to sing a song about us.

Sodden Fairfield, sodden Fairfield, has no use for bread-and-butter,

Rum for breakfast, rum for dinner, rum for tea, and rum for supper!

We are easy-going in our village, but we didn't like that.

Of course we soon found out where the young fellows went to get the drink, and landlord was terribly cut up that his tenant should have turned out so badly, but his wife wouldn't hear of parting with the brooch, so that he couldn't give the Captain notice to quit. But as time went on, things grew from bad to worse, and at all hours of the day you would see those young reprobates sleeping it off on the village green. Nearly every afternoon a ghost-wagon used to jolt down to the ship



with a lading of rum, and though the older ghosts seemed inclined to give the Captain's hospitality the go by, the youngsters were neither to hold nor to bind.

So one afternoon when I was taking my nap I heard a knock at the door, and there was parson looking very serious, like a man with a job before him that he didn't altogether relish. 'I'm going down to talk to the Captain about all this drunkenness in the village, and I want you to come with me,' he said straight out.

I can't say that I fancied the visit much myself, and I tried to hint to parson that as, after all, they were only a lot of ghosts, it didn't very much matter.

'Dead or alive, I'm responsible for their good conduct,' he said, 'and I'm going to do my duty and put a stop to this continued disorder. And you are coming with me, John Simmons.' So I went, parson being a persuasive kind of man.

We went down to the ship, and as we approached her I could see the Captain tasting the air on deck. When he saw parson he took off his hat very politely, and I can tell you that I was relieved to find that he had a proper respect for the cloth. Parson acknowledged his salute and spoke out stoutly enough. 'Sir, I should be glad to have a word with you.'

'Come on board, sir, come on board,' said the Captain, and I could tell by his voice that he knew why we were there. Parson and I climbed up an uneasy kind of ladder, and the Captain took us into the great cabin at the back of the ship, where the bay window was. It was the most wonderful place you ever saw in your life, all full of gold and silver plate, swords with jewelled scabbards, carved oak chairs, and great chests that looked as though they were bursting with guineas. Even parson was surprised, and he did not shake his head very hard when the Captain took down some silver cups and poured us out a drink of rum. I tasted mine, and I don't mind saying that it changed my view of things entirely. There was nothing betwixt and be-

tween about that rum, and I felt that it was ridiculous to blame the lads for drinking too much of stuff like that. It seemed to fill my veins with honey and fire.

Parson put the case squarely to the Captain, but I didn't listen much to what he said, I was busy sipping my drink and looking through the window at the fishes swimming to and fro over landlord's turnips. Just then it seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should be there, though afterwards, of course, I could see that that proved it was a ghost ship.

But even then I thought it was queer when I saw a drowned sailor float by in the thin air with his hair and beard all full of bubbles. It was the first time I had seen anything quite like that at Fairfield.

All the time I was regarding the wonders of the deep parson was telling Captain Roberts how there was no peace or rest in the village owing to the curse of drunkenness, and what a bad example the youngsters were setting to the older ghosts. The Captain listened very attentively, and only put in a word now and then about boys being boys and young men sowing their wild oats. But when parson had finished his speech he filled up our silver cups and said to parson, with a flourish, 'I should be sorry to cause trouble anywhere where I have been made welcome, and you will be glad to hear that I put to sea to-morrow night. And now you must drink me a prosperous voyage.' So we all stood up and drank the toast with honour, and that noble rum was like hot oil in my veins.

After that Captain showed us some of the curiosities he had brought back from foreign parts, and we were greatly amazed, though afterwards I couldn't clearly remember what they were. And then I found myself walking across the turnips with parson, and I was telling him of the glories of the deep that I had seen through the window of the ship. He turned on me severely. 'If I were you, John Simmons,' he said, 'I should go straight home to bed.' He has a way of

putting things that wouldn't occur to an ordinary man, has parson, and I did as he told me

Well, next day it came on to blow, and it blew harder and harder, till about eight o'clock at night I heard a noise and looked out into the garden. I dare say you won't believe me, it seems a bit tall even to me, but the wind had lifted the thatch of my pigsty into the widow's garden a second time. I thought I wouldn't wait to hear what widow had to say about it, so I went across the green to the 'Fox and Grapes', and the wind was so strong that I danced along on tip toe like a girl at the fair. When I got to the inn landlord had to help me shut the door, it seemed as though a dozen goats were pushing against it to come in out of the storm.

'It's a powerful tempest,' he said, drawing the beer 'I hear there's a chimney down at Dickory End'

'It's a funny thing how these sailors know about the weather,' I answered. 'When Captain said he was going to night, I was thinking it would take a capful of wind to carry the ship back to sea, but now here's more than a capful'

'Ah, yes,' said landlord, 'it's to night he goes true enough, and, mind you, though he treated me handsome over the rent, I'm not sure it's a loss to the village. I don't hold with gentrice who fetch their drink from London instead of helping local traders to get their living'

'But you haven't got any rum like his,' I said, to draw him out

His neck grew red above his collar, and I was afraid I'd gone too far, but after a while he got his breath with a grunt

'John Simmons,' he said, 'if you've come down here this windy night to talk a lot of fool's talk, you've wasted a journey'

Well, of course, then I had to smooth him down with praising his rum, and Heaven forgive me for swearing

it was better than Captain's For the like of that rum no living lips have tasted save mine and parson's But somehow or other I brought landlord round, and presently we must have a glass of his best to prove its quality

'Beat that if you can!' he cried, and we both raised our glasses to our mouths, only to stop half-way and look at each other in amaze For the wind that had been howling outside like an outrageous dog had all of a sudden turned as melodious as the carol-boys of a Christmas Eve

'Surely that's not my Martha,' whispered landlord, Martha being his great aunt that lived in the loft overhead

We went to the door, and the wind burst it open so that the handle was driven clean into the plaster of the wall But we didn't think about that at the time, for over our heads, sailing very comfortably through the windy stars, was the ship that had passed the summer in landlord's field Her portholes and her bay-window were blazing with lights, and there was a noise of singing and fiddling on her decks 'He's gone,' shouted landlord above the storm, 'and he's taken half the village with him!' I could only nod in answer, not having lungs like bellows of leather

In the morning we were able to measure the strength of the storm, and over and above my pigsty there was damage enough wrought in the village to keep us busy True it is that the children had to break down no branches for the firing that autumn, since the wind had strewn the woods with more than they could carry away Many of our ghosts were scattered abroad, but this time very few came back, all the young men having sailed with Captain, and not only ghosts, for a poor half-witted lad was missing, and we reckoned that he had stowed himself away or perhaps shipped as cabin-boy, not knowing any better

What with the lamentations of the ghost girls and the grumbings of families who had lost an ancestor, the

village was upset for a while, and the funny thing was that it was the folk who had complained most of the carryings on of the youngsters, who made most noise now that they were gone. I hadn't any sympathy with shoemaker or butcher, who ran about saying how much they missed their lads, but it made me grieve to hear the poor bereaved girls calling their lovers by name on the village green at nightfall. It didn't seem fair to me that they should have lost their men a second time, after giving up life in order to join them, as like as not Still, not even a spirit can be sorry for ever, and after a few months we made up our mind that the folk who had sailed in the ship were never coming back, and we didn't talk about it any more.

And then one day, I dare say it would be a couple of years after, when the whole business was quite forgotten, who should come trapesing along the road from Portsmouth but the daft lad who had gone away with the ship, without waiting till he was dead to become a ghost. You never saw such a boy as that in all your life. He had a great rusty cutlass hanging to a string at his waist, and he was tattooed all over in fine colours, so that even his face looked like a girl's sampler. He had a handkerchief in his hand full of foreign shells and old fashioned pieces of small money, very curious, and he walked up to the well outside his mother's house and drew himself a drink as if he had been nowhere in particular.

The worst of it was that he had come back as soft-headed as he went, and try as we might we couldn't get anything reasonable out of him. He talked a lot of gibberish about keel hauling and walking the plank and crimson murders—things which a decent sailor should know nothing about, so that it seemed to me that for all his manners Captain had been more of a pirate than a gentleman mariner. But to draw sense out of that boy was as hard as picking cherries off a crab tree. One silly tale he had that he kept on drifting back to,

and to hear him you would have thought that it was the only thing that happened to him in his life 'We was at anchor,' he would say, 'off an island called the Basket of Flowers, and the sailors had caught a lot of parrots and we were teaching them to swear Up and down the decks, up and down the decks, and the language they used was dreadful Then we looked up and saw the masts of the Spanish ship outside the harbour Outside the harbour they were, so we threw the parrots into the sea and sailed out to fight And all the parrots were drowned in the sea and the language they used was dreadful' That's the sort of boy he was, nothing but silly talk of parrots when we asked him about the fighting And we never had a chance of teaching him better, for two days after he ran away again, and hasn't been seen since

That's my story, and I assure you that things like that are happening at Fairfield all the time The ship has never come back, but somehow as people grow older they seem to think that one of these windy nights she'll come sailing in over the hedges with all the lost ghosts on board Well, when she comes, she'll be welcome There's one ghost lass that has never grown tired of waiting for her lad to return Every night you'll see her out on the green, straining her poor eyes with looking for the mast lights among the stars A faithful lass you'd call her, and I'm thinking you'd be right

Landlord's field wasn't a penny the worse for the visit, but they do say that since then the turnips that have been grown in it have tasted of rum.

# KATHERINE MANSFIELD

(1889-1923)

## LIFE OF MA PARKER

[From *The Garden Party* 1922]

WHEN the literary gentleman, whose flat old Ma Parker cleaned every Tuesday, opened the door to her that morning, he asked after her grandson. Ma Parker stood on the door mat inside the dark little hall, and she stretched out her hand to help her gentleman shut the door before she replied. 'We buried 'im yesterday, sir,' she said quietly.

'Oh, dear me' I'm sorry to hear that,' said the literary gentleman in a shocked tone. He was in the middle of his breakfast. He wore a very shabby dressing gown and carried a crumpled newspaper in one hand. But he felt awkward. He could hardly go back to the warm sitting room without saying something—something more. Then because these people set such store by funerals he said kindly, 'I hope the funeral went off all right.'

'Beg parding, sir?' said old Ma Parker huskily.

Poor old bird! She did look dashed. 'I hope the funeral was a—a—success,' said he. Ma Parker gave no answer. She bent her head and hobbled off to the kitchen, clasping the old fish bag that held her cleaning things and an apron and a pair of felt shoes. The literary gentleman raised his eyebrows and went back to his breakfast.

'Overcome, I suppose,' he said aloud, helping himself to the marmalade.

Ma Parker drew the two jetty spears out of her toque and hung it behind the door. She unhooked her worn jacket and hung that up too. Then she tied her apron and sat down to take off her boots. To take off her

boots or to put them on was an agony to her, but it had been an agony for years. In fact, she was so accustomed to the pain that her face was drawn and screwed up ready for the twinge before she'd so much as untied the laces. That over, she sat back with a sigh and softly rubbed her knees.

'Gran! Gran!' Her little grandson stood on her lap in his button boots. He'd just come in from playing in the street.

'Look what a state you've made your gran's skirt into—you wicked boy!'

But he put his arms round her neck and rubbed his cheek against hers.

'Gran, gi' us a penny!' he coaxed.

'Be off with you, Gran ain't got no pennies.'

'Yes, you 'ave.'

'No, I ain't.'

'Yes, you 'ave. Gi' us one!'

Already she was feeling for the old, squashed, black leather purse.

'Well, what'll you give your gran?'

He gave a shy little laugh and pressed closer. She felt his eyelids quivering against her cheek. 'I ain't got nothing,' he murmured.

The old woman sprang up, seized the iron kettle off the gas stove and took it over to the sink. The noise of the water drumming in the kettle deadened her pain, it seemed. She filled the pail, too, and the washing up bowl.

It would take a whole book to describe the state of that kitchen. During the week the literary gentleman 'did' for himself. That is to say, he emptied the tea leaves now and again into a jam jar set aside for that purpose, and if he ran out of clean forks he wiped over one or two on the roller towel. Otherwise, as he explained to his friends, his 'system' was quite simple,



and he couldn't understand why people made all this fuss about housekeeping

'You simply dirty everything you've got, get a hag in once a week to clean up, and the thing's done'

The result looked like a gigantic dustbin. Even the floor was littered with toast crusts, envelopes, cigarette ends. But Ma Parker bore him no grudge. She pitied the poor young gentleman for having no one to look after him. Out of the smudgy little window you could see an immense expanse of sad looking sky, and when ever there were clouds they looked very worn, old clouds, frayed at the edges, with holes in them, or dark stains like tea.

While the water was heating, Ma Parker began sweeping the floor. 'Yes,' she thought, as the broom knocked, 'what with one thing and another I've had my share. I've had a hard life.'

Even the neighbours said that of her. Many a time, hobbling home with her fish bag, she heard them, waiting at the corner, or leaning over the area railings, say among themselves, 'She's had a hard life, has Ma Parker.' And it was so true she wasn't in the least proud of it. It was just as if you were to say she lived in the basement-back at Number 27. A hard life.

At sixteen she'd left Stratford and come up to London as kitchen maid. Yes, she was born in Stratford on Avon. Shakespeare, sir? No, people were always asking her about him. But she'd never heard his name until she saw it on the theatres.

Nothing remained of Stratford except that 'sitting in the fire place of a evening you could see the stars through the chimley,' and 'Mother always 'ad 'er side of bacon 'anging from the ceiling.' And there was some thing—a bush, there was—at the front door, that smelt ever so nice. But the bush was very vague. She'd only remembered it once or twice in the hospital, when she'd been taken bad.

That was a dreadful place—her first place. She was never allowed out. She never went upstairs except for prayers, morning and evening. It was a fair cellar. And the cook was a cruel woman. She used to snatch away her letters from home before she'd read them, and throw them in the range because, they made her dreamy. And the beedles! Would you believe it?—until she came to London she'd never seen a black beedle. Here Ma always gave a little laugh, as though—not to have seen a black beedle! Well! It was as if to say you'd never seen your own feet.

When that family was sold up she went as 'help' to a doctor's house, and after two years there, on the run from morning till night, she married her husband. He was a baker.

'A baker, Mrs Parker!' the literary gentleman would say. For occasionally he laid aside his tomes and lent an ear, at least, to this product called Life. 'It must be rather nice to be married to a baker!'

Mrs Parker didn't look so sure.

'Such a clean trade,' said the gentleman.

Mrs Parker didn't look convinced.

'And didn't you like handing the new loaves to the customers?'

'Well, sir,' said Mrs Parker, 'I wasn't in the shop above a great deal. We had thirteen little ones and buried seven of them. If it wasn't the 'ospital it was the infirmary, you might say!'

'You might, *indeed*, Mrs Parker!' said the gentleman, shuddering, and taking up his pen again.

Yes, seven had gone, and while the six were still small her husband was taken ill with consumption. It was flour on the lungs, the doctor told her at the time. Her husband sat up in bed with his shirt pulled over his head, and the doctor's finger drew a circle on his back.

'Now, if we were to cut him open *here*, Mrs Parker,' said the doctor, 'you'd find his lungs chock a-block with white powder. Breathe, my good fellow!' And

Mrs Parker never knew for certain whether she saw or whether she fancied she saw a great fan of white dust come out of her poor dear husband's lips

But the struggle she'd had to bring up those six little children and keep herself to herself—Terrible it had been! Then, just when they were old enough to go to school her husband's sister came to stop with them to help things along, and she hadn't been there more than two months when she fell down a flight of steps and hurt her spine. And for five years Ma Parker had another baby—and such a one for crying!—to look after. Then young Maudie went wrong and took her sister Alice with her, the two boys emigrated, and young Jim went to India with the army, and Ethel, the youngest, married a good-for-nothing little waiter who died of ulcers the year little Lennie was born. And now little Lennie—my grandson

The piles of dirty cups, dirty dishes, were washed and dried. The ink black knives were cleaned with a piece of potato and finished off with a piece of cork. The table was scrubbed, and the dresser and the sink that had sardine tails swimming in it

He'd never been a strong child—never from the first. He'd been one of those fair babies that everybody took for a girl. Silvery fair curls he had, blue eyes, and a little freckle like a diamond on one side of his nose. The trouble she and Ethel had had to rear that child! The things out of the newspapers they tried him with! Every Sunday morning Ethel would read aloud while Ma Parker did her washing.

'Dear Sir,—Just a line to let you know my little Myrtle was laid out for dead. After four bottles gained 8 lb in 9 weeks, and is still putting it on.'

And then the egg-cup of ink would come off the dresser and the letter would be written, and Ma would buy a postal order on her way to work next morning. But it was no use. Nothing made little Lennie put it

on Taking him to the cemetery, even, never gave him a colour, a nice shake up in the bus never improved his appetite

But he was gran's boy from the first

'Whose boy are you?' said old Ma Parker, straightening up from the stove and going over to the smudgy window And a little voice, so warm, so close, it half stifled her—it seemed to be in her breast under her heart—laughed out, and said, 'I'm gran's boy!'

At that moment there was a sound of steps, and the literary gentleman appeared, dressed for walking

'Oh, Mrs Parker, I'm going out'

'Very good, sir'

'And you'll find your half-crown in the tray of the inkstand'

'Thank you, sir'

'Oh, by the way, Mrs Parker,' said the literary gentleman quickly, 'you didn't throw away any cocoa last time you were here—did you?'

'No, sir'

'Very strange I could have sworn I left a teaspoonful of cocoa in the tin' He broke off He said softly and firmly, 'You'll always tell me when you throw things away—won't you, Mrs Parker?' And he walked off very well pleased with himself, convinced, in fact, he'd shown Mrs Parker that under his apparent carelessness he was as vigilant as a woman

The door banged She took her brushes and cloths into the bedroom But when she began to make the bed, smoothing, tucking, patting, the thought of little Lennie was unbearable Why did he have to suffer so? That's what she couldn't understand Why should a little angel child have to ask for his breath and fight for it? There was no sense in making a child suffer like that

From Lennie's little box of a chest there came a sound as though something was boiling There was a great lump of something bubbling in his chest that he

couldn't get rid of. When he coughed the sweat sprang out on his head, his eyes bulged, his hands waved, and the great lump bubbled as a potato knocks in a sauce pan. But what was more awful than all was when he didn't cough he sat against the pillow and never spoke or answered, or even made as if he heard. Only he looked offended.

'It's not your poor old gran's doing it, my lovey,' said old Ma Parker, patting back the damp hair from his little scarlet ears. But Lennie moved his head and edged away. Dreadfully offended with her he looked—and solemn. He bent his head and looked at her sideways as though he couldn't have believed it of his gran.

But at the last Ma Parker threw the counterpane over the bed. No, she simply couldn't think about it. It was too much—she'd had too much in her life to bear. She'd borne it up till now, she'd kept herself to herself, and never once had she been seen to cry. Never by a living soul. Not even her own children had seen Ma break down. She'd kept a proud face always. But now! Lennie gone—what had she? She had nothing. He was all she'd got from life, and now he was took, too. Why must it all have happened to me? she wondered. 'What have I done?' said old Ma Parker. 'What have I done?'

As she said those words she suddenly let fall her brush. She found herself in the kitchen. Her misery was so terrible that she pinned on her hat, put on her jacket and walked out of the flat like a person in a dream. She did not know what she was doing. She was like a person so dazed by the horror of what has happened that he walks away—anywhere, as though by walking away he could escape.

It was cold in the street. There was a wind like ice. People went flitting by, very fast, the men walked like scissors, the women trod like cats. And nobody knew—nobody cared. Even if she broke down, if at

last, after all these years, she were to cry, she'd find herself in the lock up as like as not

But at the thought of crying it was as though little Lennie leapt in his gran's arms Ah, that 's what she wants to do, my dove Gran wants to cry If she could only cry now, cry for a long time, over everything, beginning with her first place and the cruel cook, going on to the doctor's, and then the seven little ones, death of her husband, the children's leaving her, and all the years of misery that led up to Lennie But to have a proper cry over all these things would take a long time All the same, the time for it had come She must do it She couldn't put it off any longer, she couldn't wait any more Where could she go?

'She 's had a hard life, has Ma Parker' Yes, a hard life, indeed' Her chin began to tremble, there was no time to lose 'But where? Where?

She couldn't go home, Ethel was there It would frighten Ethel out of her life She couldn't sit on a bench anywhere, people would come arsking her questions She couldn't possibly go back to the gentleman's flat, she had no right to cry in strangers' houses If she sat on some steps a policeman would speak to her

Oh, wasn't there anywhere where she could hide and keep herself to herself and stay as long as she liked, not disturbing anybody, and nobody worrying her? Wasn't there anywhere in the world where she could have her cry out—at last?

Ma Parker stood, looking up and down The icy wind blew out her apron into a balloon And now it began to rain There was nowhere

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